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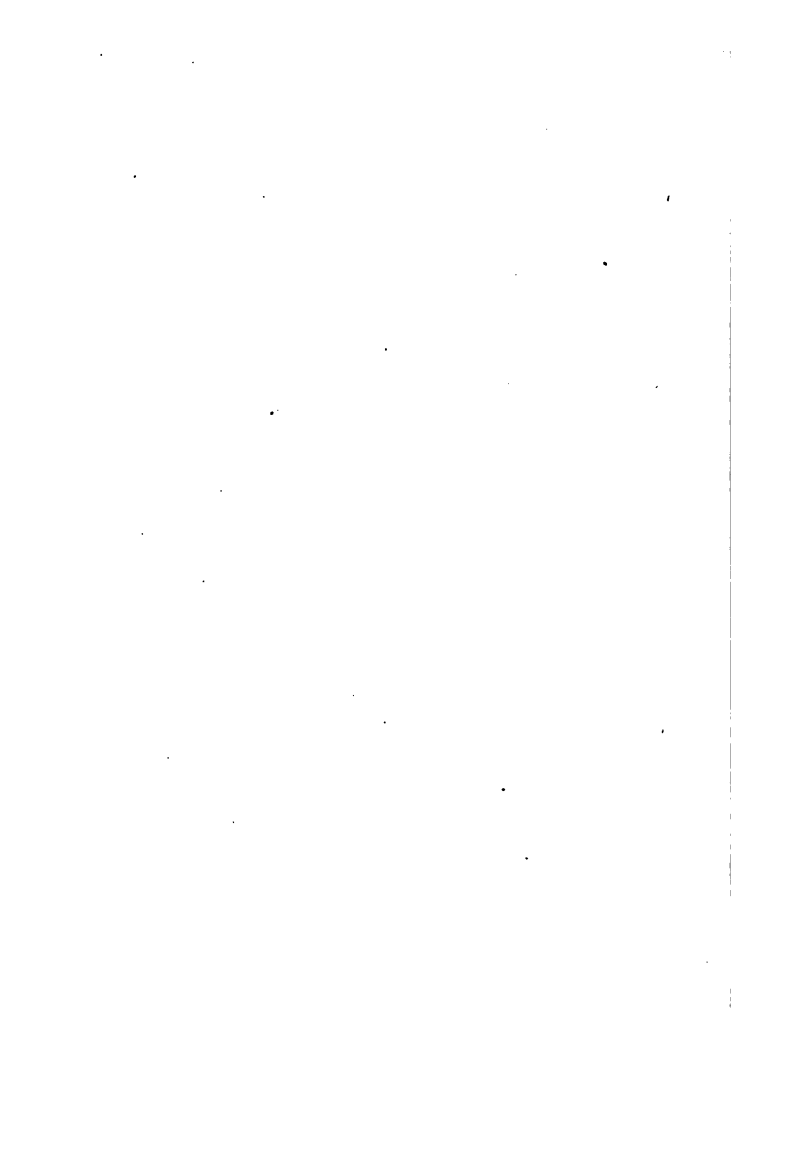
ECCLESIASTES.
LESSONS FOR
THE CHRISTIAN'S DAILY WALK.
—
G.W. MYLNE.

101. d.
414.



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ECCLESIASTES.

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OR,

LESSONS

FOR

THE CHRISTIAN'S DAILY WALK.

BY

G. W. MYLNE,

AUTHOR OF "INTERCESSORY PRAYER, ITS DUTIES AND
EFFECTS;" "FEAR NOT;" "FAMILY PRAYER," ETC.

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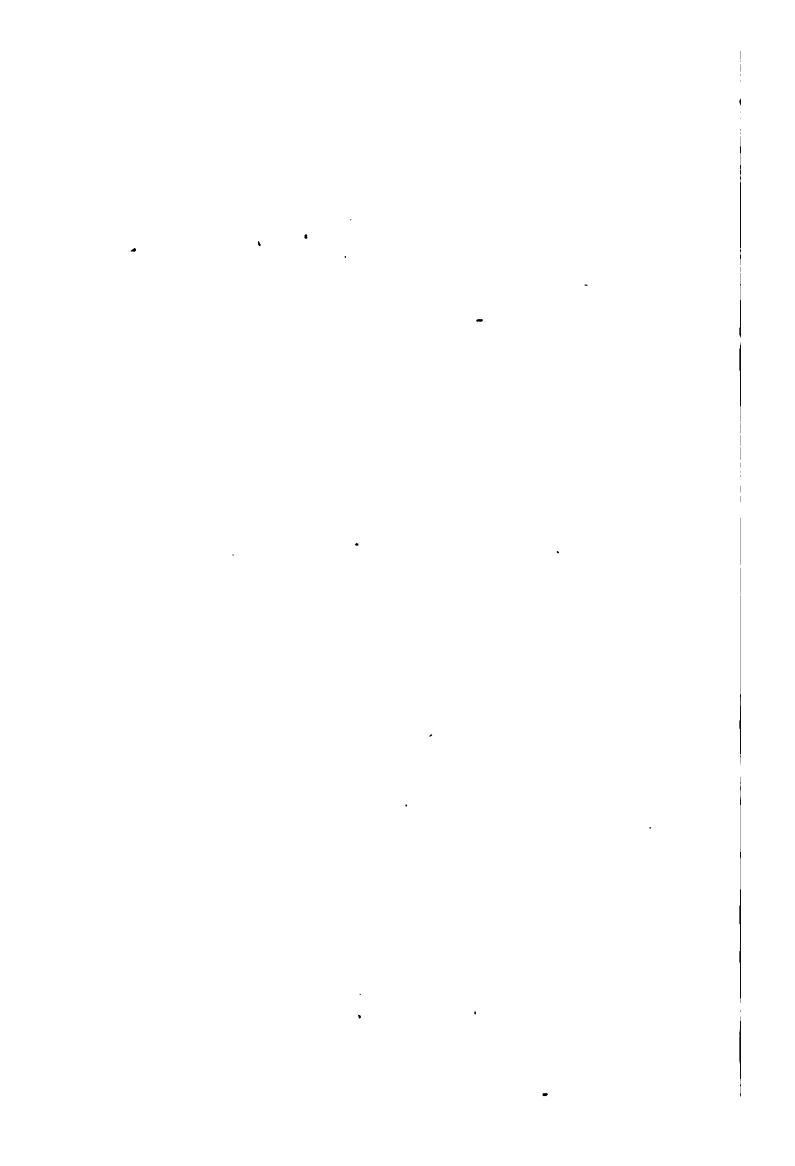
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PATERNOSTER-ROW.

PREFACE.

CUSTOM demands a Preface, yet prefaces are seldom read, more rarely still approved. Often the book explains the preface more than the preface clears the book. 'Twere wiser, then, to put it last, that, having read the book, the Reader then might understand the preface. Should books refuse to tell their tale, and thus require another to tell it for them? Reader, you know, I trust, that "Scripture" comes from God. (2 Tim. iii. 16.) One God inspired it all. God spake by Moses; God spake by Solomon;

God spake in Christ; nay, more, *Christ* spake in Moses, and in the Preacher too. One law, one code of morals, is contained in all. The mind of God is one, and always one—not one in Solomon, another mind in Christ. What Moses said, or Solomon has preached, Christ contradicts not, but confirms. That which was duty then is duty now. The times have changed, the precept is the same. The law could never justify. 'Twas meant to be, and to continue, the rule of life. The rule was founded on the will of God; His sense of right and wrong. Can this be altered? Can God be changed? What once was right is always right. What once was wrong is wrong for ever. The Gospel deepens and expands the rule, giving it infinite dimensions of truth and power. And thus the Preacher's sermons may at once be turned to *Gospel* lessons. For *this*

one thing is needful—that you *know the Lord*; that all be read, looking to Jesus and His cross. If thus thou honour Christ, the Spirit honours thee; opens the mind to see the mind of God; unfolds the unity of Scripture-truth, blending its every portion into Jesus, Himself the sum and substance of it all. Reader, may Scripture thus be opened, and thus the words of Solomon be blessed to thee and me.



ECCLESIASTES.

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."—ECCL. I. 2.

MY soul, why seek thy happiness below—here in this fallen world, where "*all is vanity?*" Oft hast thou tried it, anxious still to find some earthly good. As often thou hast found the Preacher right—that "*all is vanity.*" Thou sayest, "*All is vanity,*"—thou sayest *well*. The worldling, too, can say that all is vanity, but pursues it still. Be it not so with *thee*. Let all that's empty here lead thee to what alone will satisfy—the grace of God, the love of God, the Lamb of God; to "*Jesus Christ*, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." (Heb. xiii. 8.) Hast thou e'er asked thyself *whence* all this vanity? My soul, it comes from *thee*. Thou, in thy father Adam; thou, in thy fellows of the human race, hast caused it all. Whence comes the tempest? Whence the earthquake; the pestilence; the shipwreck; the blighted crop? Whence sickness, famine, death? Whence come bereavement, bankruptcy, and sorrow? Whence murder, drunkenness, and all uncleanness?

Whence all that is vile, and sad, and disappointing? Whence comes the universal taint—the wrongs, the groans, the misery of all created things? My soul, they come from *thee*; from thee in Adam, and from him in thee. The poison that is in thee, has poisoned all besides. Since *thou* art sinful, all is out of course. Since *thou* art vanity, lo, all things here are vain. The curse that fell on thee thou hast entailed on *them*. My soul, be humbled with the thought—consider and be wise. Look o’er the book of Nature. See all the troubles of this fallen world; see all that is disjointed, vile, and fleeting; and say, “It comes from *me*!”—My soul, thou sayest, “*All is vanity!*” Oh, look *within*, for all is vanity *there*. How swift for evil! How dead to all that is good! What rank corruption! What inbred sin! How weak thy purposes! How faltering thy course! If all is vanity *without*, ’tis tenfold vanity *within*. If all around is vanity, *thou* art the master-vanity of all. Bless God, then, O my soul—in *Jesus* thou hast that which is not vanity. In *Jesus* thou hast all that’s solid, durable, and perfect; food, riches, strength, life, pleasure, comfort, peace. In Him *what* hast thou *not*? A sure foundation! A Rock that moveth not! Unfailing help! And hope, which maketh not ashamed! Receive, then, of His fulness, and be full indeed.

“*All . . . is vexation of spirit.*”—ECC. I. 14.

Who has not felt “*vexation?*” *Who* knows not what it *means?* The infant in its cradle;

the schoolboy at his play ; e'en youth in all its freshness, and manhood in its prime—all, all have felt "*vexation*." My soul, *thou* know'st it well ! Thy sins, thy fallen nature, thine infirmities, all lay thee open to "*vexation*." Wonderful art thou in thy sensibilities ! How quick to feel ! How swift to gather sorrows to thyself through thine *excess* of feeling ! Oft hast thou murmured at thy lot, rising in mutiny against thy Maker. How oft has patience failed ! What trifles oft have wounded thee ! Some scheme of pleasure thwarted ; even a rainy day ; or yet some trifling accident—has often ruffled thy composure. How oft a kind reproof, a friendly warning—some fancied slight—a look—a smile withheld, and yet with no intention of unkindness, has filled thee with *vexation* ! How oft has wounded pride ; a humbling sense of thine infirmities ; a deep conviction of thy want of judgment ; the fear of standing low in man's opinion—*vexed* thee beyond expression !—My soul, thou art not singular in thy *vexation*. Go where thou wilt, thou'lt find it. The world is full of it. "*All*," says the Preacher, "*all* is vexation of spirit !" What means the Preacher ? Means he that spirits *should* be vexed, and glory in vexation ? That woes may *lawfully* be brooded over, or sense of injuries be *cherished* in the soul ? That morbid feelings be indulged in ? That moody silence, brooding vexation, and carking care are healthful for the soul ? Oh, no ! If God be true ; if precept have its weight, and promises their meaning—"vexation," O my soul, should have no part in *thee*. Open thou *must* be

to its trials day by day. But *where's* thy grace ; thine active holiness ; thy consistency ; *where* is thy strength, thy comfort, and thy steadfastness, if thou art conquered by *vexation* ? Hast thou, then, learned of Christ, the lowly and the meek, and not found rest, my soul ! (Matt. xi. 29.) Thou hast learned thy lesson badly. Go, learn it o'er again. Fight, then, against this habit of *vexation*. Give it no place within thee. Look to the COMFORTER to help thee. Hide thee in JESUS ; taste the tranquillity of God. Take every trial, as it rises, to thy Saviour-Friend. Then peace shall be thy portion—not *vexation*. Though faint, yet be pursuing, and thou shalt gain the victory still. (Judges viii. 4.)

"All things are full of labour."—ECCL. I. 8.

READER, how many things remind thee what thou art—a fallen creature ! Not least of these, the *toil* and trouble of this changing world. The sun and moon, and planets in their course—the restless wind—the ever-flowing, never tarrying river—are pictures of the ceaseless *toil* of man. (ver. 4—7.) The hum of cities ; the labour of the field ; the crowded factory ; the cottage loom : the bread you eat ; the clothes you wear ; the house you live in ; the fire on your hearth—all speak of *labour*. How could you have them without *labour*, either thine own or others' ? The ploughman and mechanic earn their bread with daily *toil*. But there are other modes of labour—labour in thought, and speech, and action,—not the less trying to the human frame.

My soul, envy not those who eat the bread of idleness. God, in His love, has made the curse a blessing; and thus the greater toil, the greater honour; the more the duties done, the more respect is due, if God is feared and honoured in them all. Look at the household servant—how numerous her calls! Duties to God—to master, mistress, kinsfolk, self, and friends; no time to call her own; hastily summoned from her work, her meals, or her devotions. She takes her food—for *what?* to give her strength to *labour yet again*. The toil of day is done; she lays her down—to rise and *labour* on the *morrow*! How much to try the temper, wear the body, vex the mind! yet, if she keep her soul in patience, and look to *Jesus*, not for salvation only, but for strength, for meekness, and a willing mind,—if thus she go the round of daily duties, no station is more dignified than *hers*.

Reader, whoe'er thou art—whate'er thy calling—the greatest earthly blessing I can wish thee is to have much to do, and health to do it. May all thy work be sanctified by prayer! In all thy *labour* remember *Jesus*! He, in a servant's form, once laboured here. Say, art thou wearied? *He* was weary too. (John iv. 6.) Tell Him thine every toil, and this shall comfort thee. Lean on His bosom. In His abiding presence seek thy rest. But if you know not *Jesus*, what comfort have you in your *labour*?—what comfort in *repose*? Have faith in *Jesus*. Weary of sin, seek rest from sin in *Jesus*. Does an evil conscience trouble thee? Seek rest from *this* in

Jesus. Then shall the Spirit testify of Jesus, and all thy toil be *rest*.

“*The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing.*”—ECCL. I. 8.

THE senses are but *servants* to the *soul*. The soul desires to look, and sets the eyes to *see*. The soul would hear, and sets the ear to *hearken*. The soul is *never* wearied. It listens to sweet music, after the ear is tired, and lingers, longing still for more. *When* had the soul enough of a sweet flower? *When* was it ever filled to overflowing with the soft undulations of the landscape? Nothing on earth can satisfy the soul. It quits its pleasures with a craving; sighs to renounce its satisfactions; and grieves to think how limited, how *passing* limited, are all its joys. Oh, there's a longing in the soul; a restless appetite to see and hear, to grasp, to understand; an energy for action; a stretching forth of thought; a yearning principle, that spurns the trammels of the senses. And yet (such is the tribute due to fallen nature) sense, in its feebleness, keeps down the *soul*—the soul, with all its energy, cannot o'erpower *sense*. How sad, how humbling the condition of fallen man!—Yet, child of God, *thou* hast no cause to mourn. Gifted by grace with higher faculties, thou hast wherewith to feed them to the full. By faith thou seest, hearest, tastest better things. Thou seest *Jesus* on the throne of God. Thou seest the “sea of glass,” and hearest

"the voice of harpers harping with their harps." (Rev. xiv. 2.) My soul, why linger after sense, and things of time, when better sights, and better sounds invite thee? Or why lament thy straitened means, with heavenly powers so unlimited? Then let thine eye repose on *Jesus*. The more you look at *Him*, the longer will you look. The more you look, the more will be your *power* to gaze upon Him. The more you commune with Him, the sweeter shall you find His company. Speak much to *Jesus*—thou shalt not speak in vain. The name of Jesus shall be to thee "as beds of spices, and sweet flowers." (Cant. v. 13.) The whispers of the Spirit, telling of grace and peace, shall ever and anon refresh thine ear.—My soul, these pleasures *never* fail thee. Not like the music, that *was*, and is not—no hand to sweep the chords, though ears there be to listen. Not like a feast of yesterday—gone by. Not like the flowers that once were sweet, and now are sweet no longer. Not like the landscape thou hast left behind. Thy Saviour, Friend, and Comforter, is *ever* with thee—now and to all eternity the *same*.

"*There is no new thing under the sun.*"—

ECCL. I. 9. ^

"Is there *anything*, whereof it may be said, See, this is *new*?" (Ver. 10.) So spake the Preacher. But "Stop," you say—"Solomon ne'er saw the railway's iron road. The electric telegraph was then unknown. No brilliant gas converted night to day. And no balloon yet floated in the

air." My friend, was Solomon, then, wrong? Can we prove his saying false? Are things, then, changed since Solomon? Can *we* say, "This is new?" Ah, wisdom more than Solomon's inspired the sacred Word; and One who, from the first, knew all that should happen, *to the end of time*, still said, "The thing *that hath been*, it is that *which shall be*; and that which is done is that which shall be done." (Ver. 9.) What means the Preacher, then?—My friend, *man* is unchanged from Solomon—yes e'en from Adam—until now; his nature, feelings, appetites; his sins, corruptions, and infirmities—the same as ever. The Railway carries the same freight of selfish men, as travelled formerly in other ways. The Telegraph conveys the messages of the same passions, enterprise, and avarice, that swayed our forefathers. The Gas lights up the same abodes of sin. The æronaut, from his Balloon, looks down on man the very counterpart of all he was before. Then, is there *nothing* new since Adam? My soul, is nothing new to *thee*? Yes! *grace* is *new*. Nor man, nor angels knew it at the first. And *thou*, my soul, knew nothing of it, till God Himself enlightened thee. No rite of man—no power of education, nor yet of moral character—could give it; nought but the SPIRIT of the living God.

My soul, if CHRIST is thine, and thou art CHRIST's, to thee *all* things are new indeed—new heart, new mind, new birth; new tastes, new faculties, new powers; new hopes, new fears; new prospects, new desires; new company to keep—new friends to love—new brethren to

cherish ; yes, a new world to view, a new kingdom to inherit—all things in *grace* NEW, as unknown before ; all things in *nature* NEW, since thou hast seen them in another light. *New* things thou findest in each *promise*, and in each *precept* of the Word ; thy God, thy Saviour, and thy Comforter, the *newest*, still, of all. By prayer, by watchfulness, by meditation, stir up the heavenly gift ; excite the new-born taste ; and still, at every turn, find *all* things *new*. O ye that lack variety, why seek it *here* ? Come ye, O come to JESUS, and then find all things *new* indeed.

“ That which is crooked cannot be made straight.”

—ECCL. I. 15.

Do what you may, *crosses* are crosses *still*. No art of man's device can make the crooked straight. The “train,” or ship, that bears some friend away ; the quiet sea, after a night of shipwreck ; the rain that robs you of a holiday ; the broken pieces of some favourite vase ; *all* say the same—“The crooked must be *crooked*, do what you will.” Oh, there is anguish in the thought, that *nothing* can be done, as disappointment, stealing o'er the mind, throws its dark shadows on the brow ! The soul then muses on its sorrow, and thinks again, “No ! remedy there is *none*. Truly this is a *grief* ; and I must *bear* it.” (Jer. x. 19.) Philosophy is useless then. Stern patience brings no real comfort with it. A smiling face may hide a broken heart ; and lips will speak of resignation, when the worm of

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"That which is wanting cannot be numbered."—
ECCL. I. 15.

How simple is the truth here spoken, yet how deep ! Of wounded hearts, of withered hopes it speaks: of losses, trials, sorrows ; some lighter, some more serious ; yet in them *all* the truth is still the same. Your favourite flower droops and dies ; some keepsake gift is lost ; some cherished member of the family *was*, and is not. How oft it rends the heart—it *always* costs a pang—to count one's treasures over, and to find one "*wanting*." Objects may still be found to fill the vacant place. But ah ! the missing one is *gone*, not to return again, and leaves the heart to mourn its absence. But there's a blessed secret (to those who know it) to fill such empty spaces with more than they have lost, and add ten thousand fold to their diminished store. Reader, whatever you have lost, place JESUS in its room. Fill every blank with JESUS, and it shall be a blank no more. Have you lost a friend ? Does memory cling to the spot he occupied ? You look, and look again : he is not there. No opening door brings back his well known form. Once you could number him among your treasures, but *now* you number him no more. Haste thee to fill the blank with that which cannot fail thee ; strain not thy sight to gaze on emptiness, nor fill the mind with shadows of the past. Oh, fix your thoughts on JESUS,

Think of Him, as your best, your dearest Friend. Think of His grace, His love. No friend that's living—no friend that's gone—could love thee, think of thee, or watch thee, as JESUS aye has done. Though other friends be gone, yet you can "number" *Him*. Though earthly goods be lost, yet JESUS still is there. No blank can be a blank, when JESUS fills the void. Your losses are but gains, when they bring JESUS to your soul. See *every* blank through JESUS. All that you should forget, His form shall hide. All that you *may* remember, you still shall see in Him. Memory shall thus be chastened, and God Himself shall soften every woe. But, Reader, say, who art thou? Is JESUS such to *thee*, that the void places in thy heart can *thus* be filled? Oh, if thou know'st Him not,—if He is not thy best, thy bosom Friend, it's vain to speak to *thee* as I have done. But I would ask thee to think this matter o'er. Ere other friends are taken, or other treasures gone; ere life itself is ebbing, and *thou* art no more *numbered* here, oh! seek and find the treasure, that never can be lost.

"In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."—
ECCL. I. 18.

What kind of wisdom causeth grief? What kind of knowledge is it, that increases sorrow? Perhaps it means the knowledge of the world, its vileness, folly, and uncertainty—to have learned that all its show is vain, and all its pleasure

nought. *This* causes *grief* to them, who see its vanity. God's people mourn it. And worldlings oftentimes, disgusted with themselves and all around, and having nought to sanctify the feeling, are filled with bitter disappointment.—Also to know one's own corruption, to catch a glimpse of self in all its frailty; to see our sin, to taste its power—to dread the pains, and not to know the remedy—*this* causes *grief*. Sorrow like *this* is turned to joy, when sinners look to *Jesus*. Yet many saints forget the promises, and fill their souls with bitterness, from want of faith.—Again, wisdom may mean the *Science of the Schools*—the round of human learning, and attainment in the arts. *Here* also *grief* is to be found. There is many a slip—many vexations—in searching after knowledge. The mind is hampered by its limited capacity; and, having gone thus far, it sighs that it can go no farther. How many a bright experiment ends in grief, and man discovers, to his cost, that wisdom, after all, is vanity! But, most of all, wisdom like *this* occasions *grief*, in that it tempts the soul to rest in second causes, and thus to slight the Lord. 'Tis true, there is exquisite delight in following some cherished study; to trace the hidden things of art and science, and bring to light some fact, or principle, unknown before. But *then* the world to come! Art thou *prepared* for it? What of thy *sins*? Are they *forgiven*? What will declining age, what will thy death-bed be? What is to be the end of all thy labour? If all thy wisdom end in misery, and all thy knowledge lead to soul-destruction, is it not *sorrow*, after

all?—Reader, wouldst thou be saved? Then learn thy wisdom in another school—the school of *Christ*. There thou wilt learn to know *thyself*. This is no trifling part of wisdom. And, better still, there wilt thou learn to know the *Saviour*—God, in *Christ Jesus*, forgiving sin, changing the heart, and bringing thee to glory. *This* wisdom grieves not; *this* knowledge adds no sorrow: Taste it, my friend—be happy, and be wise.

"I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?"—ECCLES. II. 2.

OF natural gifts none is more rare than *cheerfulness*; that elasticity of mind, and buoyancy of spirit; that even temper, and sunshine disposition—which cheers the man himself, and all who know him. Cheerfulness, gilded with grace, and sanctified, savours most largely of the mind of Christ; it speaks of peace with God; of resignation to His will, and freedom from sordid appetites, and cares. *Who* would reprove the beaming smile, or, in due season, the hearty laugh? In youth, especially, it is pleasant to behold it—'twere a mistaken thought to wish it gone. The cares of life will throw their shadows soon enough across the mind, and we may wish again to see some of that elasticity we were wont to chide. But *this* is not the "*laughter*," nor the "*mirth*," that *Solomon* means. He meant the *idle* laughter, the *systematic* mirth; merriment followed as an object; the love of pleasure, as the grand pursuit of life. "*Laughter*" like *this* is "as the crackling of

thorns under a pot." (Eccl. vii. 6.) Empty in sound, it tells of emptiness *within*, and savours of a mind unused to sober thought, and healthy action.—*Who* should be cheerful as the child of God? As he, who has nought to fear, whether on earth, or in the world to come! But, oh, my soul, let not thy cheerfulness assume an air of levity. Laughter is good in moderation, and the cheerful interchange of mirthful thought is oft refreshing to a jaded mind. But, oh, beware how thou indulge it to excess, or slide unwittingly into the habit of unguarded mirth. *Such* mirth as this must tell most hurtfully upon thee. 'Twill mar the spirit of prayer, unfit the mind for meditation, and eat away the taste for heavenly things.—'Tis pleasing to a man to move his friends to laughter. The play on words, the studied joke, the repartee; the art of mimicking your neighbour—his tones, his gait, his actions; to see a company hanging on your words for merriment—all this is captivating. But, child of God, beware! This will not keep thee at the feet of JESUS. Human applause is dangerous, and much to be eschewed. When tempted, therefore, to exceed in mirth, and lose thyself amid its fascinations, fall back upon thy soberness; remember JESUS, and the SPIRIT; think of thy past experience, and forbear.

"*The wise man's eyes are in his head.*"—

ECCL. II. 14.

THE worldling has no spiritual sight; his eyes are *gone*. Thus blind he will remain, except

the Lord should give him sight. He sees neither his lost condition nor its remedy. To *him*, sin is not sin—God is not God—Christ is not Christ—heaven is not heaven—hell is not hell—because he walks in *darkness*. My soul, be it not thus with *thee*! If God has given thee sight, art thou not bound to use it to His glory? Then, let thine eyes be *in thy head*, not, like the fool's, "*in the ends of the earth*." (Prov. xvii. 24.) Thou hast an eye—if rightly used—quick to discern the Tempter's snare, however well concealed. If thou hast fallen into sin, *whose* fault is it? Why hast thou eyes to see with, if thou use them not? Say not, "*I did not see it*—the Tempter was too subtle for me." This is to throw discredit on the gift of God. Thou shouldst have been more careful—*then* this grief had not been thine.—Beware of *dreaming*, as you walk along, gazing on empty nothings—on meditations of your own device. In doing so, plain duties will be overlooked. Oh, my soul, look well around thee—see what thy duties are. Look at them in the face. Turn not away because they're homely, or because thine eye is fixed on something more inviting. Thy wisdom is to keep thine eyes at home. *Home duties*, and *home temptations*, demand thine earliest care. Keep these, then, in the foreground of thy vision—*then* mayest thou safely look at what's beyond.—If you are given to abstract thought, and spend much time in *study*, oh! take care. None should observe their steps, like *star-gazers*! Some sudden call to active duties, some trifling interruption—something, that tries your patience, may prove a

stumbling-block, o'er which you had not tripped, if your eyes had only done their duty.—And thou, my soul, keep thou thine eyes from wandering in forbidden paths. When in the haunts of vanity, oh ! keep thine eyes *at home* ; hide them within the lids of watchfulness. Beware of looking *everywhere*, not knowing *what* to look for. This leads to vanity. The showy magazine ! The gay attire ! Walking temptations, mighty to allure ! My soul, thou knowest them well. Make, then, a *covenant with thine eyes* (Job xxxi. 1) ; call in thy wandering energies ; restrain the prying vision of thine appetites ; think of the grace of *Jesus*, and fix thine eyes on *Him*.

“ *Therefore I hated life.* ”—ECCL. II. 17.

So thought *Jonah*. So thought *Job* and *Elijah*, *Moses* and *Jeremiah*. (Jon. iv. 3 ; Job vi. 9 ; 1 Kings xix. 4 ; Num. xi. 15 ; Jer. xx. 14.) But were they right—these holy men of old—to rise in mutiny against their lives, and God's corrective dealings ? Not so the great Apostle. With all their sufferings, none had such cause to feel life burdensome, as *he*. If ever man were justified in hating life, 'twere *Paul* of Tarsus. Yet, with all this, and strong “ desire to depart and be with Christ,” he hated not his life. “ To me,” he said, “ *to live is CHRIST* ;” although he felt that it were gain to die. (Phil. i. 21, 23.) To hate his life would be to hate the thoughts, the presence, and the smile of *JESUS*. To *him* these treasures were intertwined with life itself. He could not breathe,

but CHRIST breathed in him; he could not journey, but CHRIST went with him; he could not suffer, but JESUS suffered in him. In bonds, imprisonment, and stripes; in watchings, weariness, and fastings; in perils by land, and perils on the deep; in these, and such like visitations, *what* was his life? 'Twas CHRIST. CHRIST in his thoughts; CHRIST in his heart; CHRIST ever present to his soul. Long as life lasted, 'twas the gift of God—the vehicle, for the time, of Paul's existence—that living state, on which was grafted, by the Spirit, the life of JESUS. How could he, then, hate life, except he hated the thought of JESUS!—Reader, this is a lesson to thee and me. Be it our aim to be with JESUS; to have done for ever with our sin and shame, and earnestly to long for glory; but ne'er to hate the life which God has given to be a blessing.—Reader, before the worlds were made, the time of death, both yours and mine, was settled to a moment in God's eternal will; and when the moment comes, nought shall detain us here. Till *then* God has a purpose in our length of days; something or other to be done, or suffered—which purpose 'tis our glory to fulfil. When God says, "Live," 'tis good to live; when He says, "Friend, come up to Me," 'tis good to die. Then, Christian, whether in sickness, want, or pain; in care, uncertainty, or sorrow—to *thee* to live is CHRIST. Thy life is precious, to the last breath and throb, because God gives it; and because, in every throb and breath, CHRIST lives in thee. Hate not thy life; despise it not; but ever honour it for JESUS'

sake ; and live that life *by faith of Him*, who gave himself for *thee*. (Gal. ii. 20.)

“ There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink.”—ECCL. II. 24.

HAD Solomon's wisdom left him ? Did he mean to say that, after all, the drunkard, or the epicure is the happiest man ? Oh ! no. The preacher's object was to ascertain which, of all earthly goods, involved the smallest disappointment. The man of sensual pleasures looks not beyond the moment. Present enjoyment is his sole pursuit. He eats, and drinks, and, for the time, is satisfied. No distant calculations fill his mind ; no stretching into things unknown ; no measuring of causes and effects ; no vast comparison of past and present science ; no thought that carries him beyond the arts of generations yet to come, and, in its yearnings after knowledge, sighs that it cannot live for ever in the fond pursuit.—Oh ! what a thought it is ! What a result of fallen nature ! Apart from grace, the more a man is raised above the brutes—the more he rises in refinement and in lofty enterprise—the more he's doomed to *disappointment* in the end. The world may profit by his labours, and applaud his lore ; but what will this avail him *when he's gone*?—Judged only with regard to earthly happiness, mental pursuits excel the love of pleasure, as darkness is excelled by light. But, weighed against eternity, sensual pleasure, and earthly wisdom are merely on a par. Each fails alike to give a

taste for heaven ; to bring the sinner to the Cross of Christ ; to take the sting from death ; or to regenerate the soul.—Christian, *beware !* We live in dangerous times, when human art, and intellect are worshipped by too many. Some, even of God's people, are led away, and think that cultivation of the taste and mind will fit them better for the joys of heaven. Others, by mental culture, would prepare the unconverted to receive the truth. Alas ! that men of God should so forget themselves ! They don't consider that, even in its highest flights (compared with heavenly truth) philosophy is, after all, a *carnal* thing. The things of earth are earthy ; spiritual things are spirit. You cannot mix the two ; therefore confound them not. The one will never help the other ; then try it not. Nought but "*Christ crucified*" will *civilize* the soul. Nought else deserves the name. Be satisfied with nothing short of this. The mind, the taste, the intellect of man, is as much fallen as the body. Nought, that directs itself to these, can cure his malady. CHRIST, e'en from first to last ; God's HOLY SPIRIT manifesting Christ ; the drawings of the ALMIGHTY FATHER's love—these, and these only, humanize the soul, lift it from earth, and nurture it for heaven.

" A time to kill . . . a time to weep . . . a time to lose . . . He hath made everything beautiful in his time."—ECCL. III. 1—11.

" To everything there is a season, and a time to

every purpose under heaven." There is a time when God ordains each varying circumstance to happen. Some things proceed directly from His hand. In others, *man* is the agent ; his love or hatred, skill or power, working mysteriously the will of God. Thus human purposes are over-ruled, and the worst passions of the heart are turned to good account. Thus "wicked hands" fulfilled the "counsel" of Jehovah in nailing to the cross the Lord of glory. (Acts ii. 23.) The "*time to kill*" was "*beautiful*." It sealed the covenant with blood—the blood of Jesus. The "*time to hate*" was "*beautiful*," when Shimei cursed David. (2 Sam. xvi. 10.) The sin was Shimei's, the benefit was David's—the benefit, the *beauty* of sanctified affliction ; the grace of resignation to the will of God. The "*time to lose*" was "*beautiful*," when Job was stripped of all that he possessed. The patriarch *confessed* it beautiful, and blessed God's holy name. (Job i.) "*Beautiful*," with the Shunamite, the "*time to weep*." Her only child was taken ; yet she said, "*It is well*." (2 Kings iv. 26.) And yet no dint of human patience, or of moral fortitude, gives beauty to affliction, or makes us recognise God's righteous hand. When you are told of shipwreck, famine, pestilence, or battle ; of families left fatherless ; of widowed mothers reft of an only child ; wealth in a moment turned to poverty ; of loss in trade, or sudden fire ; when blood runs cold with what you see or hear ; when sympathy is on the rack, and bitterness pervades the soul ; or when some act of Providence befalls thyself, and

lays thee low—*then* can you say, "It's '*beautiful*!'" It is the Lord. It must be good; Himself has done it?" (Isa. xxxviii. 15.) Ah, *this* requires a spirit taught of God; a mind renewed by grace; a heart at peace with God; to have brought your sins to Jesus; and, in the school of Christ, to learn to look at all things with the mind of God. Such wisdom comes from heaven. It is not stoical. It hardens not the heart, nor deadens it to tender sympathy. 'Tis not a dogged resignation, nor cold indifference. 'Tis faith prevailing over flesh; hope smiling in its tears; patience enduring to the end, and calmly triumphing o'er unbelief.

"*Also, He hath set the world in their heart.*"—
ECCL. III. 11.

What means this verse? What *world*, what *heart* is meant? The world is in man's heart, 'tis true—the world in all its vanity and sin. But was it *God* who set it there? The work was *Satan's*. *He* set it there, and man, with suicidal hands, finished what he began. *This* cannot be the *world* the Preacher means. Then say, *what* mean the words? Compare them with the context. You'll see that God has *set* the *world*—the world of all that happens here—in the "*heart*," or midst, of all the *times and seasons*, which the Preacher names. Survey his

list of joys and sorrows, of purpose and event. (Vers. 2—8.) Is not “the *world*”—your world and mine, the world of all our history—*set* in the “*heart*” of all the seasons, numbered there? The *sailor’s* “world;” his voyaging to and fro, his storms and calms, his shipwrecks, and his prosperous adventures; the whole is set in the *heart* of changing winds—east, west, and north, and south encircling him with breezes foul or fair. The *farmer’s* world, again, is “set” in the “*heart*” of varying seasons—sunshine and shadow, snow and rain, and frost and thaw, working with seeming opposition, yet with secret sympathy, the purposes of God, and good of man. *What* more uncertain than the wind? *What* less to be relied on than the weather? So is it with the things of life—sickness and health, prosperity and woe, giving each other place in quick succession. Life for a year, a month, a day, an hour—life for a moment! *What* is it, Reader, what has it been, what will it be to *thee*? It is as it has been; ’twill be as now it is—in length uncertain, and diverse in its hue. ’Tis so uncertain, *none* can “find out the work that God worketh from the beginning to the end.”—(Ver. 11.) And, child of God, is it not so with *thee*? The frost and thaw, the sun and rain, the calm, the storm, are not more needful to the soil, than varying experience to *thee*, to nourish grace, nip evil in the bud, to exercise and fructify the soul. Bless God for changes and uncertainties, whether in spiritual frames or outward things. Seek not to have thy “*world*” torn

from the "*heart*" of varying dispensations, but look to God, in Christ, to *overrule* them all.

"*And that they might see that they themselves are beasts.*"—ECCL. III. 18.

'Tis well to be reminded of our origin ; to see that of the same materials were made both man and beast. He, that made one, made both ; from the *same* lump He made them. (Gen. ii. 7—19.) Reader, even *now* say to the *dust*, "Thou art my father," and to the *worm*, "My mother and my sister !" (Job xvii. 14.) Nay, take the *potsherd* on the dunghill—the veriest fragment of the meanest vase—and in it greet thy kindred dust. If brother to the worm, a "near connexion" art thou to the potter's vessel. *Who* made thee differ from other forms of clay ? Not thou thyself, but *God*.—God's image was in man at first—likeness in soul, imparting to the outward man a godlike form ; the moral life, thus given, lighting humanity with godlike qualities. Man's nature was suffused with glory not its own. 'Twas lent—to be recalled at will—not permanently given. When sin came in, God's image fled, and man became a fallen creature.—Reader, compare thyself with other animals. Say, *which* is better off, thyself, or they ? They're dust, and so art *thou* ; they're mortal, art not thou the *same* ? The beasts have nothing godlike ; by nature, what hast *thou* ? Nought that is godly, nothing but what is fallen and corrupt. Thou art like the fallen

Angels—that is all. In *death* hast thou “pre-eminence” over the *beasts*? They die, and so they end. If bliss they have not in the world to come, at least they have no misery. If the spirit of the beast go “downward to the *earth*” (ver. 21), does *thine* go down to *hell*? Will it indeed go “*upward*?” Far better be a beast, and perish thus, than live eternally in misery.—And thou, my soul, in thy new nature, what hast *thou*? Nothing but what thou hast “received.” (1 Cor. iv. 7.) It was not thine; God *gave* it thee. But for His grace, more brutish than the beasts wouldst thou have been. *This* was thy nature; such is thy nature *still*. God only maketh thee to differ. Blinder than Bartimeus—more dead than Lazarus—*where* hast thou light and life? Only in *Jesus*! Only in the *Comforter*! See, then, thy nothingness. Fear not to take it to thyself. Thine is the sin; the righteousness is God’s. Thine the corruption; His the glory. Grace gives thee nothing of thine own. It clothes thee, crowns thee, fills thee with *Jesus*. Then be content. In self-esteem be nought; be everything in *Jesus*.

“*All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.*”
—ECCLES. III. 20.

WHAT a mysterious thing is *life*! The moving, feeling, breathing, thinking! *Wherein* consists the principle of being? Who can define it, fathom, or analyse it? The powers, tastes, perceptions of the mind, *what* are they? The art of pencilling the works of nature, taking the form,

the tints, the softness of the landscape, and tracing it on canvas ; the faculty of drawing from the soul the combination of sweet sounds, and thus devising melody ; the power of searching and pursuing science—Reader, *what is it ?* Say, in *what* corner of the mind it grows. *What* chamber of the brain does it inhabit ? That immaterial thing—the *mind* ; acting and acted on by matter, floating upon life's surface so mysteriously—*what is it ?* Oh my soul, *what is it*—*what art thou ?*—And, *then*, the instinct of the brutes—the horse, the ass, the dog, the elephant ! Those wondrous faculties ! Intelligence, almost akin to human ! *What is it ?* *Where* was it, ere it came ? *Where* is it, when it's gone ? It was, and *is not*. Of wonders known and physical, *life* surely is the greatest, Yet, 'tis a greater mystery still, that life should be, and *cease* to be—that life be turned to death, soundness to rottenness, and rottenness to dust ! That man and beast should mingle dust and dust, and none be able to discover which is *which* !

My soul, this leads thee to conclusions, facts, and feelings o'erwhelming to thy powers. It bids thee shelter thee beneath thine immortality ; “mortality” that's “swallowed up of life”—mortality exchanged for incorruption. For a season thou hast lived, and livest still, within an earthy frame ; thine energies called forth, thy feelings exercised, by earthly things. *Hence* thy phenomena of heart and mind ; hence all the phases of thy being ; hence all the mysteries, of which we speak. Thus flesh and spirit dwell together for a time. As age ad-

vances, the soul draws in its feelers. Its faculties shrink back within itself; its powers thus fade, and fade away, till, lo! the curtain drops in death, and all is veiled! Then earth returns to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Man, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things are then alike again. *Who* then shall say, "This the philosopher's, and this the hound's! This was fair woman's form, and this the worm's!" Reader, and *you* will dwell in dust, except the Lord should come again in our day. In dust will you abide, till resurrection sounds shall greet thine ear. When the earth casts out the dead, say, *where* shalt thou appear?

"*But they had no comforter.*"—ECCL. IV. 1.

POOR sufferers! And was there none to comfort them? Not one 'midst all their brothers of the human race! Were they not *brothers*? Sprung from one father; by the same God created; bound by the tie of blood! O *Sin*, what havoc thou hast made of all that's brotherly! But for *thee*, no grades there were of feeling and affection, cooling apace from warmth to coldness, till the name of *brother* dies on the earliest confines of relationship.—"*They had no comforter!*" Such are there still. *Some* have no comforter, because they're friendless. *Some*, because none understand their sorrows. *Others*, because no human sympathy can reach their woes. *Others*, again, because they are wild with sorrow. As far as comfort goes, they have nought

between them and suicide, madness, or a broken heart.—Reader, have *you* no comforter? Are *you* too poor, too humble, too retiring, too little like the world—that men should care for you? Or are your trials, conflicts, and temptations such as but few can understand; are you thus solitary in your sensibility? Are you tempted to despair? Ah, my friend, is there, indeed, *no comforter*? None to pity! none to love! none to comfort thee! Where then is *Jesus*? Do you know Him? Where is God's Holy *Spirit*? Does He dwell with thee, abide in thee? If not, no wonder you have "*no comforter*."—"Miserable comforters" are all earthly things. They play upon the surface; they cannot reach the heart. They cannot take the poison from affliction, or draw the arrow from the wounded soul. Such comfort you must seek where only it is found—with *Jesus*! He came expressly as a Comforter. When upon earth He comforted his friends; and when He left them, *whom* did He say He would send? Another *Comforter*! (John xiv. 16.)—Oh, my friend, *what* comfort do you need? Comfort for *sense of sin*? Comfort for sharp *temptation*?—for warring *conflict*?—for *darkness* in the soul? Is it for *sickness, poverty, or sorrow*?—for loss of *friends*?—for loss of *character*? Oh! if you love the Lord, say not, "I have no comforter!" The *Lord's* thy comforter!—"No comforter!" Is there no comfort, then, in *Jesus*?—in leaning on His bosom?—in telling Him thy griefs? No comfort in His grace? No comfort in His love? Ah! think again; and say not, "*I have no*

comforter !”—And thou disconsolate !—thou who know'st not *Jesus !*—thou who seekest for *earthly* comforters alone ! What shall I say to *thee* ? Why, bid thee also look to *Jesus !* Bring all thy sins to *Jesus !* Seek for a comforter in *Jesus !* If so, He'll not dismiss thee in thy misery ; but comfort thee *indeed*.

“ The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.”—ECCL. IV. 5.

ON *worldly* principles idleness is bad—to use one's “capital,” for lack of putting it to “interest.” In *spiritual* things it's worse by far. In earthly goods a man may have a store, and live upon it, while it lasts. Not so in grace. *There* we can have no store—no stock to go to, laid up within the soul for many days. The Christian's glory is to live from day to day—to know that in himself is emptiness—that all his “fresh springs” are in *Jesus*—daily to take his pitcher to the well ; daily to gather manna for his daily wants ; nay, every moment to receive out of Christ's “fulness, and grace for grace.”—(John i. 16.) Living upon *Jesus !* The food is to be found, *not in* us, but *without*. If it were *in* us, what need to take in more ? We ate this morning ; but eat we not again ? At noon, at night ? Eat we not on the morrow ? Why toils the labourer from day to day ? Because he cannot live upon himself. Food must be had ; and for it he must *work*. “No work, no food, no life”—this is his daily rule. So is it with the soul. Its only food is *Jesus* ; and this from hour to hour,

from day to day, the same. Of itself the soul is ever lean, ever in want of food. It knows no plenty but in *Jesus*; and every morsel of its sustenance is drawn from Him.—Oh! 'tis a miserable time when Christians have to live, or *try* to live, upon their own resources; to treasure up the days gone by, and feed upon their past experience—when days are dark, and nights are long—when “neither sun nor stars in many days” appear—(Acts xxvii. 20);—when all is blank, and still, and dead. The Spirit moves not in the soul—and Jesus hears not, or *seemeth* not to hear—no “open vision” is there of His presence. (1 Sam. iii. 1.) The man may be perfect in doctrine, rich in experience, versed in the knowledge of the ways of God. But what is *this*? Nor doctrine, knowledge, nor experience feeds the soul. They are but finger-posts, pointing to Jesus—to tell the pilgrim where he may have a meal. The man, who feeds on Christ, can feed on nothing else,—His work; His person; His love; His presence; His words; His visits to the soul; to have to say, “Jesus is with me; He was this morning; He’s with me now. With Him I’m happy—without Him I am undone. Health, strength, and peace, and comfort, I have none, except in Jesus!” ’Tis thus, and only thus, the soul is fed. Oh, then, my soul, fold not thy hands in indolence; feed not upon thyself. Seek daily strength for daily wants in *Christ*, and Christ *alone*.

"Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail, and vexation of spirit."—ECCL. IV. 6.

QUIETNESS! To many a weary plodder, how sweet the thought—*when* he has got *enough*, to end his days in *quietness*! Quietness!—many pursue thee as a phantom; few find thee in the end; because, though love of quietness is great, the love of *gain* is greater.—“Could I increase my business, enlarge my warehouse, or have a second in another street? True, my ‘connexion’s’ large enough already; my time and strength already largely taxed; but, *then*, my fortune will be sooner made; and I shall soon have *quietness*!” Thus often speaks the tradesman.—How many more “join house to house,” “lay field to field” (Isa. v. 8.), add “share” to “share,” one speculation to another—all meaning to have *quietness* at last! Alas! at such a rate, will quiet *ever* come?—But, *what* is “quietness!” Is it a cottage in a wood?—a villa with a pleasure-ground, and *nought to do*! Ah! quietness like *this* is far from quiet. What weariness, what fretting emptiness! Time, in its very course, becomes a labour; and listlessness corrodes the vitals of the soul.—Then, there’s the quiet of a competence, with literary ease, or country occupations—the farm, the chase, the garden, or the fond pursuit of nature’s science. There’s *quietness* in *these*, ’tis true; but will it stand the test of time? ’Tis quiet on the surface—is there quietness *within*? The soul, the conscience—is it quiet *there*? Does it *dis-*

turb the quietness to think of death, and judgment, and eternity? If quietness be thus destroyed, does it deserve the *name*? Nought is *true* quiet, but "quietness" "*for ever*." (Isa. xxxii. 17.) True quietness consists in having peace with God—a quiet *conscience*—Christ in the soul—the sense of sin forgiven. With quietness like *this*, a handful is enough; a pittance grows to plenty, and poverty to wealth.—Oh! 'tis a blessing to have enough to live upon; to have neither poverty nor riches; to be fed with "food convenient" for our use. (Prov. xxx. 8.) While others are oppressed with wealth, and "travail," and "vexation," that "quietness" should be our lot! All this, and *Jesus* too! This *quietness*! My wants supplied! and *comforts* too! All this and *Jesus*! My lonely dwelling lighted with His presence! Each frugal meal made sweeter by His love! My walks, my works, my solitude, my social moments—all graced with *Jesus*, and His company! Is not this quietness *indeed*! My soul, if greater wealth were thine, might not this quiet be in danger—thine ease be turned to travail? Know, then, thy riches in a handful—be content.

"*A threefold cord is not quickly broken.*"—

ECCL. IV. 12.

Union is strength, whether with two or three, or more. Thus man was never meant to be alone; and God provided him "a help meet." (Gen. ii. 18.) In *heaven* no solitude exists; neither would earth have known it, had man continued

holy. *Sin* is the cause of all the desolation, that pervades mankind. It needs an *effort* now to escape it. To make friends, and to keep them ; to float within the current of society, and not be stranded by some eddy on the lonely shore—all this is done by dint of *effort*. Without it few would have aught but solitude at last. What mean our "Corporations," our "Societies," our friendly Unions? They say, "*Union is strength*," and we must *work* to have it."—In communing with God man *must* be solitary. This is another consequence of *sin*. 'Tis true, there's *social* prayer ; but in the single act there must be solitude. No blending there can be of soul with soul, but for a season, and by an *effort* too. Sin has thrown up its barriers 'twixt man and man. Each sinful body, each fallen mind, presents an obstacle to union felt, and realised. The sense of union with the saints must be an act of faith, an *effort*—a flash of light, of more or less recurrence—and then 'tis dark again. Union unbroken is reserved for better days, when sin, with all its barriers, gives way to glory.—*Union is strength*. A twofold cord is something ; "*a threefold cord is better*." Though union here is faulty, yet, even *here*, much may be done by *union*. If two or three agree together in the name of Jesus, their prayers are mighty. How strong this "*threefold cord* !" When they, who live together, strive jointly to resist and conquer sin, each knowing his own infirmities, each trying to improve the rest—each practising the grace of meek forbearance, and humility,—they weave a cord of many folds, and

strong endurance. But if one or other cease to pray, to watch, to strive, and to forbear, how can the cord maintain its unity, or keep its substance?—“*A threefold cord!*” But *where* can it be found in perfectness? Only in *God*—in God, distinct in persons; but in essence One—divers in office, yet in essence undivided—one God, one Lord, Jehovah; one in Father, Son, and Spirit; each, in the covenant of grace, ere time began, pledged to redeem His people; each bound by covenant to love, to keep, to bless, to perfect them; all, in the unity of wisdom, majesty, and power, acting in holy concert. The Three-in-One—the One-in-Three, in mercy, grace, and truth—say, who can break *the threefold cord* of Deity?

“*Keep thy foot, when thou goest to the house of God.*”—ECCL. v. 1.

“BEAUTIFUL are thy feet with shoes, O child of God.” With brass and iron shod, go forth to tread on all the power of the enemy. (Cant. vii. 1; Luke x. 19; Deut. xxxiii. 25.) The Preacher says, “*Keep thy foot!*” A prophet says the same—“*Withhold thy foot from being unshod.*” (Jer. ii. 25.) The advice is good. To walk unshod is a sure way to pierce thyself with many sorrows. For slip-shod grace will ne’er

advantage thee, and never less so than in going to *the House of prayer*.—Leave not the Gospel shoes at home; nor lose them by the way. If so, you will not find them, when you come to worship. *What* do you think, and speak of in the way? If earthly things engage the mind—the doings of the past or coming week; the dress or manners of the passers by; the news you have heard; the letters you have had—if thoughts like these are in your mind, up to the very threshold of the door; say, will *this* forward your devotions? God's worship must begin before you leave your home; your thoughts, your speech, your eyes, be captive led. Fix them on *Jesus*, and *then* you will not have them to bestow on other things. Make *Christ* your company, in the way; and He'll make *you* his company in the house of prayer; then all its acts shall savour of His presence.—In *private* worship, or in *social* prayer, the mind can't, to the very last, be bent on other things, and spring at once from earth to heaven. Oh, there's a preparation of the heart; a setting of the countenance heaven-wards; girding the loins for intercourse with God; a deep conviction of His majesty; a pausing on the threshold of His presence—that the first word of prayer may have His blessing:—If thou would "*keep thy foot*" in seasons of devotion, be sure to keep it well at *other* times. As is thy walk, thy prayers will be. A careless walk begets a wandering mind, unfit to gather in its thoughts, and settle them in prayer. Prayer and the daily walk act, and re-act, on one another. He that is much in prayer will keep

his foot ; and he, that keeps his foot, be much in prayer. Nought feeds the soul like *meditation*—the habit of reflecting on our ways. This leads alike to holiness, and converse with the Lord. Then, child of God, at *all* times “*keep thy foot ;*” not only when thou goest to the house of prayer.

“*Be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools.*”—ECCL. v. 1.

IN converse with a friend, it is not one that speaks, but *twain* ; and of this converse *listening* is as much a part as speaking. So is it in communing with *God*. Time was, my soul, with thee, when prayer was but a form, and nothing more. No thought hadst thou of *listening* in prayer ; of watching for the breathings of the Spirit, telling thee what to say to *Jesus*, or whispering what Jesus said to *thee*. Now, by God’s grace, thou hast learnt to *hearken*. Dull is the prayer-time, when thou hearest not the voice of thy Beloved. Oh, if thou canst not feel that God is speaking to thee, as thou speak’st to Him ; His presence telling that He loves thee, hears thee, answers thee—thy prayer will be to thee a “tinkling cymbal,” or as “sounding brass.” Oft hast thou sat before the Saviour in mute devotion—on *thy* part mute, but *not* so on the part of *Jesus*—and found more eloquence in silence than in fervid utterance. But oh ! to speak, and be the *only* speaker—the Spirit bringing no response, no message from the throne ! Oh then, my soul, thou fallest back

upon thine emptiness, and art sad indeed.—Be much alive in *listening*; quick to discern the voice of Jesus; ready to obey. Oft has the Spirit beckoned thee to prayer, and thou hast framed some fond excuse—some fancied duty, or yet some occupation that pleased thee better. How oft some casual book—journal—or work of art, has robbed thee of communion with the Lord! In every room—on every *table*—looking from every *window*—there's danger, more than enough for thy consistency—*beware, beware!*—Look for the *Spirit's* movings, when you pray. Grieve Him not; nor yet resist Him in his promptings. Some word has quivered on thy lips, and been withheld. And *why?* It savoured of some duty you had wished to shun; some heart-confession that your pride refused to make; a prayer for one, for whom you did not wish to pray. The Spirit urged it; thine heart said, "*Nay.*" Say, is not this the *sacrifice of fools?* My soul, this should not be. Be more ready, then, to *hearken*. Thus shalt thou hear what *Jesus* says—what *Jesus* thinks. Thus shall the Spirit indite thy thoughts, direct thy prayers, and nourish thee for glory.

"*Be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools.*"—ECCL. v. 1.

OH what a tender thing is *Prayer*! How passing wonderful man's intercourse with God; God's fellowship with man! The motions of the *Spirit*, how refined! How easily repelled! How lightly interfered with! How promptly

thwarted in their action ! Say, do you feel a sudden burst of prayer ? Do tears flow fast ? Are your lips enlarged in speaking to your God ? Beware, my soul, how thou give up thy prayer, or break the current of adoring thought. True, it may be the time for *reading*. The Word may be in hand—the place be open, where thou art going to read. Or it may be in *midst* of study, when thought has been in exercise, but not with reference to prayer. Or yet you may be otherwise engaged—in secular pursuits, that may be left without a breach of duty. Quench not the *Spirit's* movings ; close with His invitation ; He is leading thee to fellowship with God. There, in the bosom and the smile of Jesus, you'll find all that is needed for the time. Are you but versed in Christian exercise, and know the lights and shadows that attend it, you'll learn to seize the moment, and lift your soul to heaven *when you can*.—In studying the *Word*, if aught be sent with power to thy soul ; if thought flow quickly, and light be shed upon thee from the door, thus opened into heaven—turn not to other portions, long as the Spirit stays thee *there*. This were to dictate to the *Spirit*, to interrupt His actings, and tempt Him thus to leave thee to thyself. The treasures of the Word are *His* to unfold—*His* to apply ; and if He feed thee in this, or other pasture, it is that He has stored a blessing for thee *there*. You may have wished to read some other portion, as coming in its course, or as better suited to your present need. Leave that with God. Be sure that power, thus derived, will give thee

strength for *any* trial: fit thee for *any* duty; and answer *every* end thou hadst in view. The Spirit knows thy daily, hourly need, and He has given thee what seemed Him good. Trust, then, the *Spirit's* leadings. Strive to discern His intimations. And thus increase in wisdom, grace, and peace.

"Let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God."—ECCL. v. 2.

OF thyself, my soul, thou art incapable of prayer. By nature far from God, how *couldst* thou pray? If something *must* be said, thy native powers can furnish *words*. But if the *Spirit* move thee not, it is not *prayer*. None but the Spirit's voice can speak to God. None but the Spirit's mind can reach His ear. *Why* does the Spirit dwell in thee? To be the framer of thy thoughts, the organ of thy speech, to Godward: that thou in Him, and He in thee, might think the thoughts, and speak the language of the sanctuary. To pray without the *Spirit* is the same as thinking without a mind, or speaking without the power of speech. Bright thoughts; well-rounded periods; the flow of sentiment, and earthly sympathies—*what* are they? They come not from the Spirit; they lead thee not to God. 'Tis not what *thou* hast thought, what *thou* hast spoken. What has the *Spirit* thought? What has the *Spirit* said, within thee? Thy life, thine energy, thy power, is centred in the *Spirit*. In *Him* thou prayest. In *Him* thou praisest. In *Him* alone thou art a living thing. Without

Him, while thou livest, thou art *dead*.—My soul, *whence* all thy *waverings* in prayer ; resolves half formed, and forthwith given up ; playing with duties ; uttering many things, but feeling not ? Whence all thy parleyings with conscience ; pleading for grace, yet half-afraid to have it ; striving for sin, yet longing to indulge it ; praying against some idol, yet hugging it the while ? *Whence* thy discomfort after prayer ; conscious of having dealt with God, yet not prevailed ? Is it not *this*—the mind has thought, and lips have moved, without the *Spirit* ? Why didst thou speak without Him ? Better be silent altogether than run before his motions.—In private prayer, fret not, though waiting times be long—though oft thou leave the throne, and not a word be spoken. *What* couldst thou say ? The *Spirit* spake not. Thou couldst not but be *dumb*.—In *social* prayer 'tis mostly otherwise. The need is special. The help is special, too. If one were mute, then all would wait in vain. God loves not that His saints should miss their pleasure. Thus he, who might be mute in private, is eloquent in social prayer. Thus God is glorified, and thus His saints are fed.

“ *God is in heaven, and thou upon earth ; therefore let thy words be few.*”—ECCL. v. 2.

God is above in majesty and power. He hears thine every word. He reads thine every thought. *You* may forget what you have thought or said. Not so the all-seeing God. Beware of making

vows. Who asks them of thee? Make holy resolutions, if you will; and pray for grace to keep them; have deep convictions of your own infirmity; trust only in the Spirit's power for strength; think of the love of Jesus; be daily crucified with Christ—and thus go forth to meet the trials of a fallen world. *This* will advance thee more than all thy vows.—Prolong not rashly thy times of worship, nor enter lightly on a course of duties self-imposed. If these be followed for a time, and then be given up, 'tis worse than if they ne'er had been pursued. While yet thy time remained, was it not still thine own? *Who* asked thee to employ it *thus*? God goes to meet thee at the usual hour; will He not mark thy breach of purpose?—Again, when prayer time is diminished, or study of the Word is hurried o'er, says not the Spirit, "*It was not always so!*" Thus God is mocked, and thou receivest injury. Retrograde habits speak of backward grace. Thine only safety is in going *forward*.—"Let thy words be few!" Five minutes heartfelt prayer is better than hours of formal worship.—"Let thy words be few!" Restrain the habit of empty prayer—praying for praying's sake, it may be to eke out the moments of a given time. But say, can words too many be, when God is present with thee? Does Jesus *ever* think thy words too many? Does *He* grow weary of thy company? Did He e'er motion thee to leave His presence? Thine own infirmities cut short thy prayers; Jesus can *never* wish thee gone.—Speak *often* to

the Lord, e'en though thy words be few. Thus moments of communion grow to *hours* of prayer. Originating thus, thy praying times are sweeter, than when they come from formal vows. Whole days may thus be spent in true devotion; in walking, eating, communing with others, thine every hour be prayerful, and thine every thought be sweet. Such seasons, oh! how precious, unutterably precious! My soul, reckon not on their lasting. Cherish them while thou hast them. Be loth to part with them. Thus, by God's grace, they may *return again*.

"Neither say thou before the angel that it was an error."—ECCL. v. 6.

ANGELS appeared on earth in times of old, bearing God's message to His people. They heard the vows then made, and might have come to claim fulfilment. The *priests* of God were called his *angels*, or "messengers" (Mal. ii. 7), and in the Church of Christ preachers and ministers are "*angels*" called. (Rev. i. ii. iii.) Had vows been made before the priest, and then excuse been offered for their non-performance, the priest would say, "Whiles thou didst promise, was it not thine own? *Why* didst thou vow, not meaning to fulfil? Thou hast not vowed to man, but unto God." (See Acts v. 4.) And is there not One, greater than angel, priest, or

minister, to claim performance of *our* vows ? I mean not *formal* vows, the solemn dedication of one's self, or means, to God ; all these are passing solemn, and, if broken, must pierce the soul with many sorrows ; but I mean the *resolutions*, whether of more or less determination, that either flit across the mind, or assume a more enduring character. Hast thou been sick ? Has danger suddenly beset thee ? Ere health were scarce returned, or danger gone, did thankfulness depart ? Thy vows of service—thy fervent resolutions—*where* are they ? *Where* is thy change of life, solemnly plighted in the hour of need ? Thy former books, thy pleasures, thy companions—are they renounced ? Say not before the angel—say not before the living God, “ *It was an error* ; I did not mean it so. Religion is good in sickness, but in health it's not becoming.” My friend, will God accept excuses such as these ? Ask thine own conscience ; it shall tell thee true.—And thou, my soul, I have a word for *thee*—a word for every child of God—*Think well before thy resolutions*. Even the passing thought of giving to the Lord, whether in large or small proportion of thy means, is not unknown to Him. Harbour not the thought with marked complacency, unless prepared to act upon it. Hold it far from thee ; let it not come within the range even of slight resolve, till thou canst count the cost, and see if thou have faith to make the sacrifice. To break e'en passing resolutions unnerves the soul, and, more or less, impedes its healthy action. Remember,

then, with whom thou hast to do, and aye be chary of thy vows.

"In the multitude of dreams . . . there wanteth not vanity."—ECCL. v. 7.

IN telling idle dreams there wants not *vanity*. It must be so; the Scripture says it. "What harm?" you say; "How can I wrong myself, or others, by telling them my dreams?" The vanity is *this*. At best, 'tis *needless* to describe the nothings of a dreaming hour, the mimic facts of an ideal world. The mind, that deals with Truth, thinks it a waste of breath to tell such vanities; to tread a ground, on which it finds no standing; to breathe an air without an atmosphere: sight, hearing, sound, perception, memory, all conjured up—for *what*? To tell the phantom wonders of a *dream*!—Man's *waking* thoughts are mostly vanity—mere shadows, and no more. What are thy *dreaming* thoughts, my friend? Mere *shadows* of thy vanity; the shadow of thy shadows; the mere reflection of thy nothings.—Dreams mostly hinge on *self*. Their world is thus shut up within the dreamer. If you hate to speak of self, 'tis irksome to you to recount your dreams. 'Tis but another way of feeding vanity, to have the thoughts of others bestowed upon yourself. If *Christ* be much the subject of your thoughts, you'll not have heart or mind *thus* to employ your speech. If it be vanity to tell your dreams, is it not vanity to *think* of them; to have the mind disturbed

because some fancies crossed it in its sleep? Yet, Reader, I deny it not, God may be pleased to visit thee in dreams, and stamp his truth upon thee in the night. *Such* dreams are not to be despised; they savour of something better than thyself. Some simple rules will tell thee when a dream is good. Has it made you feel your sin, and taught you that you need a Saviour? Has it brought a sense of Jesus to your soul? His love for sinners? His power to save? Have dreaming thoughts thus done what waking thoughts had *failed* to do? If so, thank God for it, and treasure up your dream; yet, not because it is a *dream*, but for the sake of what it taught thee.—God's ways are various. Mostly He brings us to self-knowledge in our waking hours; but 'tis as light to Him to do it in our sleep. Happy are they who, waking or asleep, are brought to *Jesus*. To them the world itself is one vast dream. Their true, and only waking hours, are when they feel his love.

“In many words there are also divers vanities.”—

ECCL. v. 7.

“IN the multitude of words *there wanteth not sin.*” (Prov. x. 19.) Can it be otherwise? Words are but *thoughts* made audible; the inward man clothed in external form. And what is *thought*? 'Tis but the working of the *heart* within. The heart itself is *sin*. How, then, can “*many words*” be free from it? The more the garden ground, the greater room for weeds; the more the *words*, the greater room

for *sin*.—The pride of speech is natural to man, and nought delights him more than when he is listened to. To *self* 'tis exquisite, to be the only speaker—to give the rein to voluble discourse, while others hearken ; to tell, for hours, what self has thought and done. To worldly men the pleasure is unmixed ; their conscience tells them not 'tis vanity, nor troubles them with sense of sin. But to the child of God 'tis otherwise.—I ask thee, Christian reader, hast thou e'er spoken largely, and, in after thought, not felt a sense of vanity ? Thy speech has been of doctrine—of Christian duty—of all that tends to edify the soul. We'll grant it. But has not *self* crept in ; self-gratulation at having spoken well—*self*, seeking to be praised for soundness, candour, or discernment ? Have not the promptings of the Spirit been outstripped—thy lips gone faster than His teaching ? Hast thou not spoken oft for speaking' sake, loath to renounce the charm of hearing *self*—unwilling to give way to others ? Poor humanity ! Alas ! I pity thee.—Oh ! 'tis a dangerous thing to have the gift of speech—the love, and power, of letting it be known. 'Tis well to know how we may hit the golden mean ; to steer midway 'twixt cold reserve, uncourteous silence, and the opposite extreme ; if need be, to speak much—if more expedient, to say little. Frankness, and openness of heart, are pleasing : a readiness to impart knowledge, experience, and information ; to give one's mite to cheer the social circle with apt discourse. But be it ever done in meek submission to the Spirit, with inward self-possession

and with prayer; that self be crucified, God's glory simply sought, and the whole man be captive led. Thus to possess the soul is glorious. Say, is not this to have the mind of Christ?

"In many words there are also divers vanities."—

ECCL. v. 7.

OH! what a power there is in "words!" On lightning's wing they fly, bearing their messages to heart and mind, telling invisibly, yet surely, on the hearers. Who should be guarded as the Christian in his speech! How oft a thoughtless *word* turns holy talk to controversy and vain jangling! How often, through a *word*, some worldly theme is started, then eagerly pursued, while heavenly things are disregarded! How oft a single *word* stirs discontent, brings injuries to mind long since forgotten, and sets men harping on their grievances! How oft a *word* kindles the smouldering embers of dislike, or fans the flame of scandal! These, and like evils, might be much avoided, if we would only *think* before we speak, and weigh the probable effect of what we are going to say.—'Twere a sad bondage to the *worldly* mind, for ever to keep watch over its thoughts and words. To careless *saints* the task is likewise hard. But, to the heart well kept, Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden light. (Matt. xi. 30.)—Reader, is this experience thine? Art thou not bound to practise what thou knowest? Why hast thou, then, the faculty of thought, quick in its movements as the lightning's

flash ; strong in its powers of forecasting ; in the twinkling of an eye, able to calculate effects, and stop ideas halfway 'twixt thought, and utterance? Why, but to use thy powers *well* !—Be quick in speech, if need be ; but calm in thought, collected in discourse. Much may be done by *practice* ; unruly tongues be tamed, loose habits be corrected, and every word be captive led to Christ.—Before you mention what you've seen or heard, say to yourself, "*Should I repeat it?*" Will it expose no faults of others? Will idle curiosity be fed, or vain remarks be made? Is it not better to keep it to myself?" Much time and comfort would be saved, did men but reason thus! Examine well the converse of a day ; balance your watchfulness against your thoughtless speech. Compare the loss and gain incurred by either, and *then* you'll see that if in careful speaking there are divers benefits, "in many words are also *divers vanities*."

"Riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt."—ECCL. v. 13.

How little is *self-interest* understood! *Self* is much made of in the things of time, but little thought of for eternity. If self is body, self is also soul. After the *body*-self is laid in dust, the *spirit*-self is still alive—doubly alive for happiness or misery ; self lives for *ever*. All that we do, has influence on self, its interest or its injury. All that self does, has bearings on its state, either in hindering, or helping its eternal

good. Man, in his blindness, sees it not. Thus "bitter is put for sweet, and sweet for bitter; good is called ill, and evil good." (Isa. v. 20.) The miser hugs his gold. To *him* his gifts are losses—all that is kept is gain. How different the Bible truth, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty!" (Prov. xi. 24.) Thus the Christian finds that what he keeps he loses, and what he gives he gains.—Oh, for more faith to see this principle—more faithfulness to *act* upon it! 'Tis easy to avow it, where self is not concerned; but to say "Amen" to it, when *self* is called to *give*—*this* is another thing.—Reader, have you ever given in faith, and found that God increased your store! Have you ever had a hoard—a sum put by, and cherished—and yet have difficulties come, and clouds obscured your prospects? (I speak not of the comfort to the *soul* in giving, or of the *spiritual* loss sustained when gifts have been withheld.) *Then* can you understand how "riches" may be "kept to the *hurt* of those that own them."—If thy means exceed thy wants, *what* dost thou with the rest? *Why* dost thou keep it? Is it for some ideal want—not to provide for children (this may be overdone)—nor yet to meet some necessary call? Is it in verity kept for *self*? Ah, what will self do with it, when self is gone? Say, for *which* then is it kept?—the mouldering corpse, or the departed soul? You keep it to your *hurt*.—Yet giving, *of it-self*, boots nothing. It neither saves nor sanc-

tifies. (1 Cor. xiii. 3.) To give *indeed*, men must be *saints* indeed. Is love to Christ the motive of your gifts? Then are you qualified to give indeed—able to lend to God. (Prov. xix. 17.) Money, to pass with God, must all be coined in the very mint of faith. No loan will He avow, nor interest pay, save upon that which bears Christ's image, and His superscription. To give in faith—to give in love—to give with understanding—Reader, may this be thine, and mine.

"In all points as he came, so shall he go."—
Eccl. v. 16.

As we came naked from our mother's womb, naked shall we return, nor carry in our hand aught that we had below. (Ver. 15.) Oh, what a character this gives to earthly things! They are all connected with a sinful world. They are left behind, because they cannot enter heaven. Hence the Apostle's moral to the Preacher's truth, "Having food and raiment, *let us therewith be content.*" (1 Tim. vi. 8.) How few of man's possessions are really needed! Take food and clothes away—the rest are mostly useless. We live in times so artificial, 'tis hard to say what are mere luxuries, and what are needful comforts. God's servants oft are carried down the stream of vain conformity. Did they but keep the Scripture rule in mind, what loss of time and strength would be avoided! The Scripture says not "*Be thou content,*" without

a reason. God would not stint His children, nor ask them to abstain from aught, merely for self-denial. It is that injury is wrapped in the indulgence, and good is gained in keeping from it. —I pray thee, Reader, analyze thy time, and occupations. See how far thy thoughts are lost, and energy expended, in seeking things, or doing works, that are of no real use. E'en little things have great effects. Each want that you create; each needless article, or ornament, for house or person; every pursuit you follow must have its influence on your soul,—if in nought else, at least in *this* respect, that more or less it occupies the mind. You say, "'Tis but a *moment*—the thing is quickly done; the object's *bought*, the arrangement's *made*. It all falls in with daily occupations, and habits ready formed; *no harm* can possibly arise." Oh, my friend, nothing can lodge within your mind, e'en for a moment, but it must tell upon your life. Experience is made up, for good or ill, by objects ever flitting through the mind. The more that Christ is thought of, the more the life is pure. The more the world is in the thoughts, the less will Christ be there. Little things soon make great things. A great world is made of *little* worldly things. Be jealous, then, with godly jealousy! Beware! Your vines have tender grapes. (Cant. ii. 15.)

"Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire."—ECCL. VI. 9.

'Tis sickening to a man to long for what he has not—for what he *cannot* have; in the midst of poverty, to sigh for plenty; to aim at luxury, and have nought but simple fare: to have dreams of grandeur and ambition, and yet to walk in humble life. To be on fire for scenes sublime and beautiful, and yet have nought before one, but the lowland flat, or village green; to think of others in sweet sylvan shades, or yet breathing the mountain air or fresh sea-breeze, when dusty books and chimney-tops are all we have to look at; to have spent our holiday with choice companions, and then return to business company, and occupations—all this is sickening to the heart. Oh, how "*desire*" wanders, refusing to be satisfied with present comforts! Memory revels in the past; hope dwells upon the future. The soul thus feeds on shadows, and leaves *reality* behind. There's bitterness in *this*, more than the tongue can tell. Philosophy says, "Repine not at thy lot, but *make the best of it.*" This is cold comfort, after all. Formality says, "Hush! 'tis the will of *Providence.*" Neither is *this* a cure for *wandering desire*.—The Christian has a remedy, that never fails, when properly applied—*the Saviour's presence.* *This* turns poverty to riches; invests the humblest meal with luxury; makes crowded cities pleasant

as the mountain top ; imparts refreshment in the midst of labour ; fills voids with fulness, and instead of absent ones, gives us the presence of the Friend of friends.—Children of God ! your Father says, “ *All things are yours* ” (1 Cor. iii. 21)—and so they *are*, in the degree and manner that is good for you. If I am Christ’s, the gold in all the world is mine, and I have just as much as suits my interest. If more were good for me, say, would not more be given—of money, station, company, or office ?—*Come back*, then, wandering *desire* ! Roam not abroad o’er that which is not thine ; *that* is forbidden ground. What is thy present lot ? I pray thee, scan it well ; look at it with the glass of faith—you’ll see a blessing in it. You’ll find a *Father’s* love, a *Saviour’s* presence, the *Spirit’s* comforts—wrapped in the garb of present things, and rays of glory coming from them all. Is not “ the sight of the eyes,” with such *realities*, better, far better, than the shadows of *wandering desire* !

“ *That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is MAN.* ”—ECCL. VI. 10.

OH, what a name is “ *Man* ! ” What worlds of meaning are shut up in its brief space of letters ! What floods of evil ! What depths of woe ! What mighty histories ! What a ceaseless round of change ! The name of *man* ! Once it meant all that’s comely, glorious, and happy—all that is stedfast, solid, and enduring ; backward, it pointed to its Maker, God ; forward, it looked to glory. Alas, how changed ! *Now* it

means all that's fallen, and corrupt; all that is far from God, estranged from glory, change-ful, and changeable. Such, such is *man*; such (in thyself), my soul, art *thou*.—Nothing is changeable but *man*. *God* knows no changes. The *angels*, fallen and unfallen, aye live and act on changeless principles, of good or evil. Sun, moon, and stars revolve in orbits fixed and unvarying. Plants, minerals, and animals are ruled by laws and instincts, regular and sure. E'en the uncertain weather, and the fickle wind, change-ful in order of succession, change not in nature and effect. *Man*, fallen *man*, is the *one* exception to the rule. Thus changed and change-ful, man has himself to thank for it. As he's the type, so is he the *cause* of change. The first seed of *sin*, lodged in the heart of *man*, contained the germ of change; root, stem, and branch—the flower, and fruit, of all that hap-pened since. Hence came the change of empires, dynasties, and powers; of customs, languages, and laws. Hence, the excess of cold and heat, moisture or drought. And hence, the endless changes of events, so hard to calculate, so diffi-cult to meet. Look *where* you will, and *when* you will, there's *change*.—The Preacher says, "That which hath been is *named*." He means that *he* had named the history of the past, the order of the present, in all its change-fulness—and now, in a *word*, he gives the sum and substance, the root and essence of it all—'tis "*Man!*"—But, wondrous to relate, within the precincts of that very name is found again all that man was at first; yea, infinitely more. 'Tis holiness in *man*;

wisdom in *man*; stability in *man*; glory and happiness in *man*; eternal life in *man*; yea, *God* in *man*; the second *Adam*—the man *Christ Jesus*! Oh! my soul, mourn not thy changes, thy changefulness, thy changeability! 'Tis overruled for good. Thou hast found thine all in Him that knows *no change*.

"A good name is better than precious ointment."

ECCL. VII. 1.

MANY who fear not God, nor care for man, think much of losing their *good name*. On *moral* principles 'tis well it should be so; and, failing a higher rule of action, 'tis wholesome for society. 'Tis so far well to have a name for moral worth; but will your character bear *God's* inspection? *That* is the question. If your good name consists merely in human merit, I pity you, my friend. This will avail you nothing in the end. Has *Christ* said of you, "*I will write upon him my new name?*" (Rev. iii. 12.) Is *Christ* the heart, the head, the substance of your character? Are your merits *His* merits? *His name* your only trust? His *cross* and *blood* the rock, on which you stand? *His* character the ground of your pretensions? And yet there is a character—"a good name;" the outward witness to the inward grace; "a good report of them which are without"—that's precious to God's people; not for their own sake, but the Lord's.—Beware of seeking a good name for anything but

Christian truth. If the world speak well of you, merely because you're kind, polite and amiable, 'tis not a name worth having. Better, if so it happen, be scouted for the name of Christ, than to have praise of men for human merit.—Plume not yourself upon your character. If it is good, the glory is not yours; then take not to yourself that which belongs to *Jesus*. Oh, what an artful thing is flattery! The love of a *fair name*—how stealthily it works upon the soul! Some unwise friend commends you. You say, "Give *God* the glory; the gifts are *His*; so are the graces too; grieve not my soul by praising me."—Your friend is hardly gone, wondering at your deep humility, when straightway *vanity returns*; you lay the flattering unction to your soul; take to yourself the praise you had rejected, and fall in love with your own character.—*Simplicity!* Thou lovely grace! How rare it is to find thee! We *all* are *actors*, more or less, and play our part, thinking what men will say of us.—*A good name!* Often it sickens one to think of it; how self has worshipped it; how self has suffered from it! My soul, beware! Glory in nought but in the cross, the righteousness, the name of *Christ*. Think not of self, nor of thine own good name.

"*The day of death is better than the day of one's birth.*"—ECCL. vii. 1.

"THIS is an hard saying; who can hear it?" Hard; yea, impossible to flesh and blood. 'Tis spoken to the *saints*; and yet it is not every Christian that can bear it—so few have made their calling and election sure.—My soul, *thou*

must plead guilty to the charge. Content with present privilege, thou hast not duly sought to realise the world to come. Shame be upon thee, for thus despising thine inheritance!—Reader, art thou a child of God? If so, I charge thee solemnly, halt not half way 'twixt unbelief and glory. The work within thee is imperfect, if thou long not for “the Kingdom.” I mean not the desire to have done with sorrow, toil, and care; but the desire *to be with Jesus*—to have no cloud between thee and His glory. Some men will tell thee that the desire to depart, and be with Jesus, will unfit thee for thine active duties. This is a great mistake. *Who* ever longed for *glory*—and yet *who* ever acted up to *duty*, as did *Jesus*? Can you do better than walk in *Jesus*’ steps? Can you suggest a better rule?—Believe me, nothing will strengthen you for trial, or set you free from love of earthly things; nothing will make you cool in danger, or wise in counsel; nothing make earthly comforts half so sweet, or lawful pleasures half so pleasing, as the *desire to be with Jesus*—the waiting till He beckon thee to glory.—Can it be wrong to wish to be with Jesus—to long to see His face beyond all longing? Say, *what* is love without it? The love of Jesus!—His love to thee—thy love for Jesus! *This* is the soul of godliness—the very principle of heaven. The more you love Him, the more you’ll long to be with Him. The more you love Him, the better will you serve Him.—Some put away the thought of death *advisedly*, and fix the mind alone on *Christ’s return*. But is this scriptural, or apostolic? *Paul* earnestly desired

Christ's second coming, longing to see his glory ; and yet he also longed for *death*. (Phil. i. 23.) Which is the better ?—To wait for Jesus in a world of sin ? Or to be with Him *now*, and thus attend Him when He comes again ? (1 Thes. iv. 14.) Should fear of death detain thy longings here ? Is it not always better to depart and be with Jesus ?—Reader, what has thy *birth* done for thee ? It brought thee to a world of sorrow, pain, infirmity, and sin. What will thy *death* do for thee ? *Which* will to thee be better—birth or death ? Say, art thou of the Preacher's mind ?

*"It is better to go to the house of mourning,
than to go to the house of feasting."*—ECCL.
VII. 2.

NOT so the worldling thinks. *He* shuns the house of woe. The darkened rooms—the solemn stillness—the very fact of death, disturbs him. The chastened looks, the swollen eye, the mourning garb,—all have a message to his conscience. They speak to him of what he's not prepared for—*another world* ! Oh ! my soul, thou canst look back, and tell what a relief 'twas once to *thee*, to escape such scenes, and find thyself again in haunts of vanity ; *then* thou couldst breathe once more. But things are altered. For *now* thou findest in the house of woe a pleasure, that thou would'st not find in worldly merriment.—*Why* is it so ? Is it thy meat and drink to hear the mourner's sob, to see the tear, to listen to the tale of sad bereavement ? Oh,

no !—but 'tis a feast to thee, *because* thou feedest there upon the Saviour. He's present with thee in the house of mourning. Oft there thou meetest with the saints, in all the fragrance of affliction sanctified ; the stars of promise shining upon them in the night of sorrow. Thou gatherest light and fragrance to thyself in communing with *them*. Christ's glory, seen on them, alights on *thee*. Thy soul is full with feasting upon *Jesus*.—But 'tis not *always* so. 'Tis not in every house of woe, that faith and grace are found. In *some* the name of Christ is neither named, nor welcomed. 'Tis *then* thine hands hang down ; such visits pain thee to the heart. Yet, even *then*, the house of mourning is better than the house of feasting. For Christ goes where thou goest ; stays with thee *there* ; and when thou com'st away, attends thee *still*.

“ *Sorrow is better than laughter,*” the Preacher says (ver. 3). When things are bright, and sorrow far away, the soul too oft forgets that all is vanity. The sight of sorrow brings that truth to mind ; lays bare the secret sin, the dormant frailty ; shows us at once our deep necessities, and their remedy in Jesus. To weep with them that weep ; in *their* frail humanity, to be reminded of our own ; to sympathize with sorrow, till the springs of woe are opened in ourselves—all this is good. 'Tis better than a feast. The bark of faith mounts on the flood of sympathy, bearing the soul to Jesus.—The house of mourning is a blessing. It presents a void, that *must* be filled ; sorrow, that *must* be comforted ;

corruption, that *must* be turned to glory. It shuts us up to Christ ; and that's a *feast*.

"It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools."—ECCL. VII. 5.

NONE question this most wholesome truth ; but few there are who take it home. "Let *others* be reproofed ; but, as for *me*, I cannot bear it." Thus speaks the human heart. My soul, many are thine infirmities, and none more humbling than thy dislike to take reproof. Did I believe myself so vile as I profess to be, could I take fire at hearing of my faults ? "*The least of saints ! The chief of sinners !*" Such do I call myself ? A vain confession, if I'm not prepared to welcome kind reproof ! Oh, for more knowledge of myself ; more of that chastened mind ; more of that genuine humility, that says, "*Amen !*" when self is justly censured.—Oh, what a hypocrite thou art, my soul ! Ready to feed upon the praise of others, and shine in fancied excellence—how mean, how passing mean, art thou in thy reality ! If those, who think of thee most highly, saw how thou bear'st reproof, *what* would they think of thee ?—Oh, there's a majesty of soul ; a greatness more than human, in welcoming reproof. *Music* is sweet. Its cadences fall gently on the ear, and tune the heart to favour those who make it, and thank them for their melody. Thus shouldst thou feel, when kindness prompts a friend to tell thee of thy faults. *What* can a friend do *more* ? What could a friend require

more of *thee*? How grateful shouldst thou be to him, who wounds *himself*, in healing *thee*; willing to bear thy wrath, rather than suffer sin upon thee.—“*The rebuke of the wise!*” *Who* is “the *wise*” here spoken of? He that is wise enough to be *faithful*. Don’t say, “He’s not entitled to reprove me. His youth, his station, or his character, unfit him for the office.” Hadst thou a *thorn* hurting some tender part, would any be too young, too low in rank, to draw it forth? Or wert thou locked in *prison*, would any be too vile to turn the key, and give thee liberty? The only question to be asked is *this*, “Has he, then, told the *truth*? Is the failing really *mine*? Has he hit the nail upon the head?” If so, thy thanks are due to him. E’en though he be mistaken, and charge thee wrongfully, yet should’st thou *thank* him for his good intentions.—Reader, is this saying hard to *thee*? Well, so it is to *me*. Of myself, I cannot hear it, and I say, “Alas! *who* is *sufficient* for these things?” Say, wouldst thou have this grace? *I* fain would have it too. *Then*, what remains for thee and me? To learn of *Jesus*—of Him, who did no wrong, yet meekly suffered (1 Pet. i. 21—23)—to study *Jesus*—to hide ourselves in *Jesus*—that we, in some poor measure, may *follow* Jesus too.

“*The song of fools.*”—ECCL. VII. 5.

IN nought is character displayed more than in love of *Music*—the *kind* of harmony that satisfies

the hearer. The songs of drunkards in their cups bespeak the taste of those who sing them. The martial air, the plaintive ditty, the flaunting ballad, speak for themselves; each tells the *mind* of him, whose choice they are.—The effect of music on the soul is most mysterious. The *ear* is pleased with it, it knows not *why*. The *heart* responds instinctively, in cadences as measured as the air, that tunes its sympathy. 'Tis not the sound alone; not the mere chain of notes, vocal, or instrumental; not the bare fact of melody, nor the harmonious blending of melody with melody. All this is purely *physical*—of itself it speaks no moral. 'Tis that it finds within the breast a secret, and responsive agency—a wondrous something that accords with it—a harmony of feeling 'twixt him that hears, and him that penned the melody, as real as the tenor and counter-tenor of the music.—This principle is native in the soul—as much a part of nature, as the mind or members. With few exceptions, men cannot hear sweet sounds, and be insensible. Hence it exerts a wondrous agency for good or evil. Tastes are imbibed, propensities encouraged, and habits formed, unconsciously it may be, yet most decidedly.—Have you ne'er watched your mind, while listening to melody? Have you ne'er traced its *after* tendencies in thought and feeling? Have you ne'er found yourself more grave, or gay, more noisy, or more thoughtful, according to the sounds, to which you have listened? I counsel you to trace these agencies of mind—to analyse your habits, tastes, and feelings—and, if

you are given to music, to watch its bearing on your character. In this, as all your works, seek how you may grieve the Spirit least, how most ensure the Saviour's visits to your soul.—If sacred sounds attune to holy meditation—suggesting thoughts of better things—awaking sweet remembrances of *Jesus*, and thus disposing thee to intercourse with *God*—say, has not *other* music an influence as *real*, in strict accordance with its character? See, then, I pray thee, that thy tastes lead not to folly in thy melody; for surely, if thy soul be injured, thou art not wise to harbour it; it then becomes "*the song of fools*" to thee.

"*Better is the end of a thing than the beginning.*"

—ECCL. VII. 8.

ARE *all* things better in their *end*—good things as well as bad—things pleasant, and things painful; is it alike with *all*? Is *summer* best, when ended? Time spent with choice companions—a walk with a bosom friend; are *these*, too, best when ended? Are parting sighs better than smiles at meeting?—The truth is *this*—all that man does is *sinful*; nought passes through his hands without defilement, thus giving birth to sinful actions, thoughts, and tendencies. Thus *all* things *human* begin and end, in *sin*; sin in the "blade;" sin in the "ear;" sin "in the full corn in the ear." Is not the *end* of *sin* better than the beginning? Each sinner's course is best when *ended*; a sinful life is closed, and

God is glorified, in judgment or in grace, what-e'er the sinner's end.—A sinful *world* will be far better in its *end*; for then God's kingdom will appear, eternal righteousness come in, and sin and sorrow disappear for ever.—Things pleasant bring temptation: the while they last, we are never proof against it; when they are ended, the *danger* is at an *end*, and *this* is better.—The Christian should esteem each evening better than the morning; for then there's one day less to come, of sin, of conflict, and temptation—one day the less between the soul and glory. Say, Christian, wouldst thou consent to live thy days *again*? Wouldst thou have the shadow to return upon thy dial (Isa. xxxviii. 8), even for an hour? Wouldst thou bring back thy thoughts, thy words, thine actions? Wouldst thou have *self* dug up, e'en from the grave of yesterday—to gaze upon its doings? That be far from thee, O my soul! *All* things to *thee* are best, when *ended*. What-e'er there was of *pain* is gone; what-e'er there was of *pleasure* is replaced tenfold. While the thing lasted, pleasure was mixed with pain, enjoyment marred by sin; but now the thing is gone, thou mayest be glad. When all is gone, *Jesus* is left behind; salvation, mercy, grace, and peace, all left behind: the end of other things shall make no end of *them*. *Jesus* is left! All joy, no sorrow—all peace, and no temptation, left in *Him*! Then say, canst thou regret the end of times and seasons, the end of all that's sweet and tender, loving and refined? Canst thou regret earth's

brightest joys, since *Christ* is left behind? Is not the Preacher right? Is the *beginning* better than the *end*?

“*The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*”—ECCL. VII. 8.

Pride is the opposite of *Patience*. Man is impatient, since he is *proud*. Am I impatient with the ignorant—’tis that I pride myself upon my knowledge. Am I out of patience with the vulgar—’tis from conceit of my superior breeding. Many are proud, who think it not. Because they make confession of their sins, or condescend to men of low degree, they think they are humble. But let vexations come—have they to bear reproof, to meet the faults or ignorance of others, impatience tells the truth—they are *proud*, not humble.—Impatience argues *ignorance of self*. Wouldst thou be patient—look at thine own corruptions; survey thy features in the Scripture glass; consider well thine own deformity; study the failings of thy character. Ah! if thou know’st thine heart, *none* will appear so vile, so ignorant, so trying, as *thyself*. Thou wilt wonder *then* how men can bear with *thee*, and *not* how thou canst bear with *them*.—Wouldst thou be patient? Think of the cross of *Christ*. *What* nailed Him to the tree? The bloody sweat; the crown of thorns; the tears; the pains; the taunts; the buffetings; the piercing cry; *what* caused them all? *Thy sins and mine*! Christian, remember *this*—thy sins and mine! Canst thou know this and be *impatient*!—Think of

the *pit*, from which He snatched thee ! Think of the *price*, at which He bought thee ! Think of the *grace*, with which He clothes thee ! Think of the *bliss*, with which He'll crown thee ! Say, canst thou think of *this*, and be *impatient* !—Man prides himself on many things—his wit, his rank, his power, his moral goodness. For *this* he sets before him some model of perfection. But, oh ! my soul, thou hast a pattern to consider, *the God of patience* ! The more of patience, then, the more of *God*—the more of *Jesus* ; the more of God—the more of glory, majesty, and greatness. The more impatience—the more of Satan, the more of all that's vile. Were pride allowable in any, *he* might be proud, who is *patient*. But he knows that *this* is not his own. He cannot boast ; from God he had it—to *God* he gives the praise ; and, by his patience, gives glory to the God of patience more and more.

“Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry.”—
ECCL. VII. 9.

OF human passions none is so quick as *Anger*. Hence by a *hasty* one, we mean an *angry* person : thus man instinctively writes his own character in the words he frames. Satan, indwelling in the soul, invests the passions with a wondrous power—and on the stock of fallen nature is engrafted the strength, agility, and cunning of the *fiend*. Hence all the quickness of the passions ; hence the electric speed, at which they move. Temptation lures—then lust conceives—

sin is brought forth—the work of moral death all finished *in a moment*.—Say, *who* can trace the progress, from the first *thought* of anger to its outbreak? Oh! my soul, I gaze on thee and wonder, to think of all thy properties and powers. Within thee dwells a world of mystery. *Where* lurks the poison in thy veins? In what secret principle is hid the element of anger, ready to show itself so quickly? To see thee, in thy gentler mood, who could suppose thee capable of violence? No tinder less inflammable, when free from sparks—no lake more calm, when undisturbed by winds, than *thou*, when not exposed to provocation. *What* angered thee, my soul? Thy brother differed from thee! He *dared* to have opinions of his own! And *so* you lost your temper!—Or, yet, some one reproved thee, slighted, or contradicted thee. “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.” (James iii. 5.) The veriest trifle sets thee in a flame.—Do thy brother’s *failings* anger thee? Thou sayest, “My feelings are acute; I cannot bear with him.” My friend, God bears with *thee*! He sees thine every sin, and *yet* He loves thee, bears with thee!—Boast not of *sensibility*; it is a *carnal* thing. “*Fine feeling*” merits not the name, save it be joined with *meekness*. All true refinement comes from *God*. Nowhere can it be learned, save at the cross of *Christ*.—Restrain thy feelings; smother thy sensibilities. When words grow quick, be prompt to check them. Deal with thy passions, as the Psalmist dealt with wicked men; *be dumb with silence*. (Psa. xxxix. 1—2.) Oft hast thou said, “I

will not speak a word." But resolution failed. You spake—your brother answered ; reply provoked retort—and *then* 'twas over with thy meekness ! Scan well the spot where once thy feet have slipped, and, as thou nearest it again, *beware !*

"Anger resteth in the bosom of fools."—

ECCL. VII. 9.

God's estimate of folly is different from man's. In Scripture words, the *godless* man's a *fool* (Psa. xiv.), the *base* (Job xxx.), the *rash* (Prov. xiv.), the *slanderer* (Prov. x.), *mockers* (Prov. xiv.), *idolaters* (Rom. i.), *lovers of pleasure* (Eccl. vii. 4), the *undutiful* (Prov. xv.), *self-confident* (Prov. xxviii.), the *spendthrift* (Prov. xxi.), and, as here, the man of *angry* passions (Job v. 2 ; Prov. xiv. 17). It *must* be so. God's Word is ever right. Wisdom is the opposite of folly. Wisdom, we know, is peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated. Meekness itself is *wisdom* called—the wisdom from above (Jas. iii.), the wisdom of the angels ; of saints made perfect ; the wisdom of God Himself.—Is meekness wisdom—then anger must be *folly*. Does not thine own experience confirm it ? *When* wast thou *happy* in thine anger ? A savage pleasure it may give thee, while it lasts ; but leaves it not a *sting* behind ?—Is it, then, wise to be *unhappy*, when thou canst have it otherwise ? Is it wise to lose thy temper, to reap anger's bitter fruits ? The heaving breast ; the flashing eye ; the smart contention ; the sullen mind ; the feeling of

estrangement from each other ; sad conflicts 'twixt thy duty and thy moodiness, 'twixt pride and due confession of thy fault—*when* did these make thee *happy*? *When* camest thou uninjured from thine anger? *Whom* didst thou hurt the most—thyself, or him with whom thou lost thy temper?—Does anger help thee in thy *prayers*? Canst thou draw nigh to *Jesus* in thy wrath? Or if He visits thee, how looks He on thee? Canst thou return his look? Ah no; thou dar'st not look on *Jesus* in thy folly.—Say not, "*I cannot help it.*" Most injured words! How oft they are spoken wrongfully in sin and shame!—" *I cannot help it!*" Grieve not the Lord the *Spirit*. Is *He* not ever with thee? *Whose* is the power? *His*, or *thine*? Is anything too hard for *Him*? Can *He* not cope with thine infirmities? Can *He* not make thee strong? When anger rose within thee, and the first crimson mantled on thy cheek—when angry words first quivered on thy lips, was not the *Spirit* prompt as thou? Did He not say, "*Forbear!* Do not thyself this wrong?" *Why* didst thou slight the Comforter? Was He not right? *Why* saidst thou, "*I do well!*" (Jonah iv. 9.)—Meekness is wisdom; anger is folly. This we may learn from *Moses'* history. When Moses walked in meekness, he was wise—for *then* he found favour with God, and dignity with man. (Num. xii.) When he was wroth, he proved his folly. For *this* he forfeited his entrance to the promised land. (Num. xx; Deut. i. 37.) My soul, 'twas written for *thy* learning. Then learn thy lesson well.

"Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days are better than these?"—ECCL. vii. 10.

SUCH questions are not wise. They savour either of ignorance or discontent. If former days were really better, 'tis discontent—if not, 'tis ignorance. At all events, days past, and present, are just what God has made them—'tis bad to raise the question.—Faith takes matters as they come. Blind unbelief asks many questions; it often says, "*I wonder!*" One says, "Trade was far better ere I entered business—*I wonder* how it is!" Another, "Markets were better ere I took to *farming—How can it be!*" A third, "Fortunes were sooner made, when I was *young—Why does it happen thus?*" "The *seasons* are not what once they were," exclaims a fourth—"all rain, no sunshine; *what* can the reason be?"—*What* are the times, my friend? *Who* made, *who* ordered them? Out of whose bosom came they? *Who* holds them in His hand? To quarrel with the times is to find fault with *God*. He hath made them beautiful in their season. (Eccl. iii. 11.) If they please thee not, *whose* fault is it? Couldst *thou* have made them better?—Examine well the links, that interweave time present with time past—the curious chain of providential dealing. Look at the ordering of events; one hanging on the other, in sequence perfect, though mysterious. Survey the mighty texture—God's will, God's providence, the wondrous workings of His power. *These* are the warp and woof, the sum and substance, of the times; times past, times present, and times future; your

times and my times ; the times of all men in all ages. To change the *times* were to derange the ordering of Providence from first to last ; to break the golden chain ; to mar the beauty of the structure. God's dispensations revolve in orbits fixed and sure, all moving, acting, following, in perfect order. To pluck one cross event away—to change sunshine for rain, or rain for sunshine—sorrow for joy, or joy for sorrow—easy for strait, or strait for easy—were violence as great, as to arrest the planets in their course, or sweep a constellation from the skies.—You say, “Times past were better than the present.”—Is *God* less present *now* than then ? His paths more intricate ? His ways less sure ? Has grace, then, changed its character ? Is it harder to be found ? Is *Jesus* not the same ? Is man less wicked *now* than then ? Does he deserve a milder treatment ?—Measure not times against times—thy lot against the “fortune” of thy forefathers. Measure thy “lot” with *thy deserts*—and say *which* best becomes thee, to thank God, or *complain* !

“ *Wisdom is good with an inheritance.* ”—
ECCL. VII. 11.

WISDOM is good, *with* an inheritance, or yet *without* it. But without wisdom an heritage is bad. He, that inherits nothing, may be wise to “gather substance, and leave it to his babes.”

(Ps. xlix.) But to inherit substance, and not be wise to husband it, is dangerous. Many are wise enough to plod, and use their earnings well, who have not wisdom to employ what *others* leave them. Nought tries our wisdom more than substance, suddenly inherited. Some men make shipwreck of their *virtue*, others have lost their *reason*, upon the quicksands of an *heritage*. A poor exchange indeed!—*What* is it constitutes the love of money? 'Tis something more than the desire of *having*. There is in *money* a mystery of power, to dazzle and to turn the brain; a *something*, that intoxicates the man, and makes him other than he was before.—Poor human nature! Never so little, as when the greatest in thine own conceits; never indeed so wretched, as when thou think'st thyself most enviable!—Oh! 'tis a sight, to see a man unchanged by an inheritance; with all the "*faculties*" he had before; nor lifted up in manner, nor suddenly transformed in style of living. 'Tis sad to lose your friend in his new equipage, or fine estate! That *money* should loose the bonds of fellowship, or cool the flame of love! Yet so it is—alas for poor humanity!—"Wisdom is good with an inheritance"—wisdom to humble thee beneath thy riches; to make thee blush at thy prosperity, and tremble for thine honour; wisdom to clothe the naked; to feed the hungry; largely to give to God what God has given to *thee*; wisdom to look to *Jesus*; to look beyond thy riches; wisdom to desire a better heritage—that which is "incorruptible."

(1 Pet. i.) Woe to the man that has an heritage, and lacks *this* wisdom.—They, that bequeath an heritage, cannot leave wisdom to their heirs ; but *God* ne'er gives His heritage, but, with it, He bestows the gift of wisdom ; wisdom to know the value of the heritage ; wisdom to love it ; wisdom to adorn it ; wisdom to live according to the grace bestowed ; wisdom to discern evil from good, and good from evil ; wisdom to resist the world, the devil, and the flesh ; wisdom to know that earthly wisdom's nought, and thus to seek the wisdom "from above." Reader, this wisdom, and this heritage be *thine* !

" *Wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence.*"

—ECCL. VII. 12.

"*Money*" defends a man from many ills ; from hunger, cold, and nakedness ; from being houseless, friendless, penniless. 'Twill save a man from injury and insult ; many oppress the poor, who would not vex the rich. *Money* invests a man with dignity. *Money* will often save from death ; food, medicine, nurses, medical attendance, may all be had for money. *Money* will help a man to right ; it pays for "justice," and thus "defends" from loss of property or character. *Money* will bribe officials, and save from weariness and loss of time. *What* will not money do in this poor, mercenary world ?—" *Wisdom*," again—mere earthly wisdom—"defends" from much that's hurtful. *Wisdom* devises remedies ; is fertile in resource ; and often saves from poverty or shame. 'Twill solve perplexities ; and, under

Providence, will change adversity to prosperous seasons. *What* will not wisdom do, if there be only scope to use its powers ! Yes, *money* and *wisdom* are means for earthly good ; but *there* they stop. *What* do they in the hour of death ? *What* in the judgment day ? Can *money* purchase heaven ? Can *wisdom* renovate the soul ? Can it know the truth of God ? Can it clothe with righteousness, and cover sin ?—*Wisdom* and *money* ! Place not thy confidence in either. Will they ease the burdened conscience, or heal a blasted character ? Can they bring back the father to the fatherless, or dry the widow's tears ? Many would change their "better fortune," as it's called, for early days of competence, or toil, with less to tempt and dissipate the soul.—I trow there's many a Christian student sighs for his first experience, ere zeal for "honours" hampered him, and spoiled his singleness of heart.—Learning that has to be unlearned ; storing the mind with what must be forgotten—Reader, beware of *this*. It will not help thee, or for thyself, or for the cure of souls.—*Wisdom* and *money* ! Would'st thou be wise and rich ? Be wise in *Jesus*—be rich in *Him*. He is thy wisdom : He thy riches too. *This* wisdom giveth life. *This* wealth redeems from death. There's no defence like *this*. "*Excellent*" knowledge"—"*excellent*" possession ! 'Twill guard thee here. 'Twill perfect thee hereafter ; arm thee with power ; beautify with grace ; invest with glory. In giving *Christ*, it gives thee *all*. It gives thee wisdom—it gives thee riches durable and true. (Prov. viii. 18.)

"In the day of prosperity be joyful."—ECCL.
vii. 14.

Prosperity, thou meteor of bliss, *who* woos thee not? *Who* seeks thee not? From earliest dawn of hope, ere life's first prospects are begun, thou flitt'st before the mind. *What* merchant, tradesman, man of learning, or aspirant for fame, but thinks he may be *prosperous*! Some call it "*Providence*." Some call it "*Fortune*." Some call it neither—yet *all* desire to be prosperous.—Prosperity is the gift of *God*. The Preacher says, "In thy prosperity be *joyful*;" yet he would also say, "Rejoice with *trembling*." (Ps. ii. 11.) *God's* gifts are good, if rightly used—all meant to be received with thankfulness. *All* may be sanctified—'tis by the Word of *God*, and prayer. (1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.) Prosperity is sweet, but dangerous. It makes the worldly man tenfold more worldly; and men of *God*, from being prosperous, have pierced themselves with many sorrows. (1 Tim. vi. 10.) 'Tis well when prosperous times come *gradually*; not from a sudden rush, but step by step—for then the soul is not so apt to lose its balance, and to forget the Giver in his gifts. Hast thou been prosperous in life? I ask thee, how is thy soul affected by it? *God* gave thee thy prosperity; has it drawn thy heart to *Him*? Has having *little* made thee long for much? Has having *much* made thee desire more? Has it eclipsed salvation from thy view, and made thee think the less of heaven? Hast thou asked a blessing on thine increase? And, ere you placed it in your coffer, have you,

in spirit, shown it to the Lord, that He might sanctify it? Has *He*, then, shared your store? Have you well considered the snare infolded in each shining piece, and prayed for grace to use it well? Has each step in thy prosperity enlarged thine heart, humbled thee, proved and bettered thee? There's nought in gold itself to lead astray. 'Tis in the heart that loves, the mind that misapplies it. *Grace* is sufficient for prosperity; nought can withstand the power of grace. 'Tis well to find a sweetness in prosperity; to eat thy meat with pleasure; to enjoy thy comforts; to be thankful that poverty is not thy share—*yet* to rejoice with moderation, and a chastened heart; seeing a snare in all things, and watching unto prayer; knowing that *this* is not thy portion; not thine inheritance. 'Tis only thine *to look at* for a season; use for thy need; and, in the end, to leave behind thee. Thy true prosperity is in better things than these.

“*In the day of adversity consider.*”—ECCL.
VII. 14.

IN thine adversity *consider* that thou deserv'st it all; that, hadst thou nothing but adversity, 'twere but thy due; that every moment free from trouble is a mercy. Had the full curse been poured on thee and me, our life were nought but sorrow and vexation.—*Consider* that God afflicts thee for thy profit, to bring thy sins to mind, and lead thee to the Cross. Believer, God chastens thee in love, to make thee still partaker of His holiness. (Heb. xii. 10.) How oft hast thou

forgotten Him ! But *He forgets not thee*, and thus He chastens thee. *Consider*, how much thou livest to the world—how little to the Lord. How earthly, sensual, and devilish thy nature ! Thy thoughts, how vain ! Thy service, how unprofitable ! *Consider*, then, God's love in chastening thee.—Art thou in sickness, *consider* thy many days of former health—*all undeserved by thee !* *Consider* thy many helps in trouble, God's presence, and his grace—*all undeserved by thee !*—In sleepless nights, consider how many nights thou hast slept soundly and sweetly—*all undeserved by thee !* *Consider* Him, who gives thee songs in the night—*all undeserved by thee !* In poverty, *consider* how all thy former wants have been supplied, food, raiment, lodging, and so many comforts—*all undeserved by thee !*—Hast thou incurred the loss of sight or hearing, the loss of limbs, or power of using them ; consider, then, thy former powers ; how much enjoyment thou hast had in seeing, hearing, moving, handling—*all undeserved by thee !* Art thou kept from going to the house of prayer ? Are all thy Sabbaths spent at home—it may be on a bed of languishing ? *Consider* how many Sabbaths thou hast spent in full enjoyment of the means of grace—*all undeserved by thee !* *Consider* Jesus, the Fountain of all ordinances ; the Bread of life ; the Shepherd of the sheep ; the Prophet, Priest, and Teacher of His people. *Still* thou hast Jesus—Lord of the Sabbath, the spring of Sabbath blessings—*all undeserved by thee !* Thou tried believer, CONSIDER, then, thy light afflictions ; they are *but for a moment* ;

ordered in wisdom, tenderness, and love. CONSIDER *Jesus!* what sufferings He endured—all for unworthy thee! Then faint not, nor be weary, but *consider* the “weight of glory”—glory eternal—glory “far more exceeding” than thy woes—glory, *all undeserved by thee!* (2 Cor. iv. 17.)

“*God also hath set the one over against the other.*”—ECCL. VII. 14.

ADVERSITY “*over against*” prosperity; prosperity “*over against*” adversity; balanced against each other with unerring skill; in each, respectively, the due proportions nicely weighed,—*so* nicely, “*that man should find nothing after God*” (ver. 14), that none should say, “It might be better done.” The word is to the *wise*. Then, Christian, I appeal to *thee*. *Could* it be better done? Say, are God’s ways unequal? Have they been so to *thee*? ’Tis true, thy path is chequered—sweet chasing bitter, and bitter sweet, in quick succession. It may be that bitter is more frequent than the sweet—that *thy* prosperous times are few and far between. Is there no *reason* for it? Is the balance, then, deranged? *God* knows the reason, though unknown to thee. He keeps the balance true between thy wants and their supply, between His chastenings and thy good. He is not—*cannot* be—unkind, unequal, or untrue. Perhaps you cannot hit upon the sin, and say, “For *this* I am chastened.” But say, my friend—if there’s no special *sin*, is there no special *want*? No grace to strengthen? Infirmary to check?—God’s

ways are *always* equal; His purpose well matured. How beautiful His providence! How exquisite His skill! Grace poised against temptation, joys against sorrows; the lights and shadows of experience thus perfected, and perfecting each other. Were all *prosperity*, souls would be lifted up; were all *adversity*, the soul would always faint. God's ways are equal; *look back and see!* Had times been pleasant with thee, experience been sweet? How surely they were followed by deadness in the soul! Thy joy was gone, thou knew'st not *why*. Ah! but *God* knew it. 'Twas the *adjusting of the scales*, that nothing might exceed.—Or had *work* gone prosperously, whether in earthly things, or in the cure of souls? Sooner or later crosses came—some disappointment, something to bring thee down, something or other counter to thy will—'twas the *adjusting of the scales*.—And so with health, and other comforts, God keeps the balance true. Watch it in great, watch it in little, things; the events, the thoughts, the feelings of the day. You'll always find it so—*the balance must be kept*. Hence all thy variations in the scale of comfort, the endless shades of thine experience. 'Tis ordered well, that thou and I might *find nothing after God*—nor say, "He has left his work undone."

"*Be not righteous overmuch.*"—ECCL. VII. 16.

How can this be? Can any man have righteousness to *spare*—goodness sufficient for himself, and for his brother too! False creeds may teach

us this—not so the Preacher. When zeal o'ersteps discretion; when tasks are self-imposed; when forms are trusted in; when flesh is vainly mortified—all this is being "*righteous overmuch*." God's people fall unwittingly into this very thing. *Prayer*, as a task, persisted in, that we may think how *long* our prayers have been; this is a great mistake. It's wrong in principle, and practice too. I prithee, look and see. Have you never been more fretful after prayer, more worldly, more inclined to levity? The truth is *this*—you prayed too long; your mind was over-taxed; your soul responded to your weariness. The enemy rejoiced in your infirmity—you were "*righteous overmuch*."—Or yet you have found refreshment in the *house of prayer*. You have gone a *second* time, and found the same. You went *again* (three services, three sermons in a day!)—the third occasion undid the other two. Trying to have too much, you lost it all. The wearied brain could not recall its former exercise; the jaded memory broke down—you were "*righteous overmuch*."—'Tis oft the same in *reading Scripture*. The mind is proud of its performances, and does too much. To read each day so many chapters; in such a time to have gone the round of Scripture—rapidly to move from History to the Prophets, from Gospel to the Law—and, in the hurry, to embrace doctrine and practice, the prayerful mind, and critical research—my Friend, you are "*righteous overmuch*!" 'Tis not the way to grow in grace, or knowledge. Were you to spend a lifetime o'er a Psalm, gaining each day refreshment to your soul—'twere better far, than

thus to scamper through the Word, and do so little after all.—When household duties are neglected for the sake of prayer, *this*, too, is being *righteous overmuch*. The same is true when men are incommoded by our prayers. The servants waiting in the hall, the carriage at the door—the elements meanwhile preferring their complaint, while prayers too lengthy, or deferred too late, engage the company—say, is not this being “*righteous overmuch?*” Prayer, meditation, and the Scriptures—how good they are ! Yet there’s a *time* for all things. If duties rise so thick, that you are hindered in your prayers, e’en *this* is better than prayer persisted in, and *duties left undone*. Beware, then, Christian friend, and be not “*righteous overmuch.*”

“*Be not overmuch wicked.*”—ECCL. VII. 17.

Is there a point in wickedness, which men may safely reach, but which ’twere dangerous to overstep ? Can we covenant with justice, that it spare us ; or agree with vengeance, that it touch us not ? (Isa. xxviii. 15.) Will God wink at transgression, because it’s *small* ; or pardon sins, because they’re *few* ? Has man a light side, and a dark ; goodness to make amends for folly ; virtue to neutralize his sin ? Is corruption only partial ? Have we wherewith to remedy the Fall ? *One sin* brought ruin on Adam and his race. *One sin* ! Was there, then, no virtue left ; no

room for further license ; no redeeming power in the soul ? Was wickedness *already* "overmuch ?" Let Scripture answer. Let our own imperfect faculties, inbred corruptions, and fading nature tell the tale. We are fallen, fallen, fallen in body, mind, and soul. *Innocent* enter we the world ? Ah, no—ingrained with sin, e'en from the cradle ; steeped in corruption from our mother's womb. Our sin is *born* in us—its germ wrapped in the buddings of our infancy, and drawing its nurture from our growth.—*Overmuch wickedness ! What* can be overmuch, where *all* is much ?—comparison's degrees all lost in universal sin ! *Man* makes comparisons—*God* knows them not. Our very breath is sin—*one moment's* life involves it ; one passing thought incurs the charge.—*Overmuch wickedness !* Do not mistake the Preacher. He warns thee, sinner, to pause in thy career, not to run riot in thy wickedness ; to go no further in tempting God, and trifling with thy soul. Ere the door of grace be closed, or thy heart be hardened more, he urges thee to think upon thy ways. Ere health be ruined in the haunts of vice ; ere power of thought be lost through idleness ; ere life itself be sacrificed in sin—he tells thee to retrace thy steps.—*Overmuch wickedness ! What* is it ? The next round of worldly pleasure ; the next visit to the alehouse ; the next solitary glass ; the next breaking of the Sabbath ; the next scoffing at the Word—this may but seal thy doom, *this* may be overmuch wickedness to *thee ! Beware*, then, *oh, beware !* "From this" advice "withdraw not

thou thine hand." (Ver. 18.) *Beware, then, oh, beware!*

"*He that feareth God shall come forth of them all.*"—ECCL. VII. 18.

"COME forth" of *what*? Come forth from dangerous extremes; from snares on either hand; from being over righteous, or wicked overmuch. There's wondrous depth in Solomon's experience. He always hits the nail upon the head; and Gospel light only confirms his sayings. Can it be otherwise? The Same, who spake by Paul or Cephas, guided the pen of Solomon. Is it not true, my Christian friend? Art thou not exposed to danger, on the right hand and the left; now tempted into carelessness, now led to hush thy conscience wrongfully; one moment to neglect thy duties, and the next to build too much upon them? How needful, then, the Preacher's warnings! How comforting his promise, that *grace* shall do its work from first to last! By *grace* we're *chosen*; by *grace* we're *called*; by *grace* made *willing* in the day of power. (Ps. cx.) By *grace* we *live*. By *grace* we *stand*. By *grace* we're *kept*. By *grace* we *persevere*. By *grace* we enter *glory*. But for this *grace*, what could we do? No faith, no hope, no strength, no peace, were ours. How could we battle with our sins? How rise above temptation? How flee from snares? How overcome the enemy of souls? How but by *grace*? How but by power not our own!—In Solomon's day 'twas still the same. God called his chosen ones. By *grace*

He saved ; by *grace* He sanctified ; by *grace* He glorified them. Without this grace how could the promise stand ? Man's strength is nothing ; his perseverance nought ; his good intentions less than nothing. 'Tis not man's "*will*"—God's "*shall*" is that, which does it. God says, "*It shall be ;*" "He that feareth God *shall come forth* of them all." These promises are given, not to exalt, but humble us. Boasting is excluded. By *what* law ? The only law that *could* exclude it—the law of *faith and grace*. (Rom. iii. 27.) Tell man that *he* can do it—you feed his pride, deceive his soul, and only lead him further from God, and deeper into sin. Tell him that *grace* must do it—you humble him low in the dust of helplessness. My soul, God's Grace has saved thee, built thee on Christ, and watered thee. 'Tis God himself has laid the topstone of thy glory, while saints and angels shouted, "GRACE, GRACE unto it !" (Zech. iv. 7.) Oh, my soul, thine only hope is *this*—that *God* is *faithful* ; that, having loved His own, He loves them to the *end*. (John xiii. 1.) In life, in death, through all eternity, this will thy glory be—that Grace has done it all.

"*There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*"—ECCL. vii. 20.

GOD's ways are perfect—perfect in wisdom, holiness, and power. God knows no change, no shade of turning. (Jas. i. 17.) God's *words* are perfect as Himself ; in meaning definite ; in truth unbending. God's only standard of morality is *God Himself* ; His only test of worth, His

own intrinsic purity. With God, "*just*" means just, as He interprets justice—integrity without a flaw.—"*Goodness*" is likeness to the living God; for God is good—and "*good*" means *God*. It means all that is holy, pure, and wise; with no admixture of aught that is not godly. How, then, shall "man be *just* with *God*?" (Job ix. 2.) When "judgment" forms the "line," and "righteousness" the "plummet," *who* can abide its test? (Isa. xxviii. 17.) *Whose* character will square with such a scrutiny?—Think it not hard. To have a *lower* test would set aside the principles of justice. God were no longer just, no longer good, did He not judge thee by His own perfections.—Reader, does not thy very conscience tell thee so? Instinct informs thee of God's character. Would He be *God*, if fallen creatures feared Him not? And *wherefore* fear? Because the conscience feels that God is just, and deals with us accordingly. What means the fear of death; the shrinking from God's presence; hiding (nay, I should say, the *wish* to hide) from His all-seeing eye? Why frightened at a shadow? Why startled at a leaf? Why have a dread of darkness? But because thou knowest that *God is good*; that *God is just*; and thou thyself art neither just nor good.—Reader, wouldst thou have fellowship with God? Wouldst thou inherit glory? Thou must have righteousness, and goodness, perfect as God Himself. Nought else can equal thy necessities—nought else comply with God's demands. *Where* can this perfectness be had? Where, but in *Jesus*! *Art*

thou "in Christ," my friend? Ah, what a question! How much depends upon the answer! Sayest thou, "Yes!" or, "No!" Art thou in Christ? If so, that spotless robe, that perfect righteousness is thine; for it is Christ's; and thou art made the "righteousness of God in Him." (2 Cor. v. 21.) Would less suffice thee? Does God require more? As Christ is, so art thou—holy, and just, and good; good in God's goodness; perfect in God's perfection. E'en "in this world" 'tis done. (1 John iv. 17.) By faith 'tis done already—nought can be added—nought shall be taken from it. As Christ is, so art thou.

"Take no heed unto all words that are spoken."

ECCL. VII. 21.

THAT which to *thee* is spoken, 'tis wise to hear. All else 'tis wise to disregard; 'tis not intended for thee, either by God, or man. Thy neighbour's thoughts are sacred. Till he impart them, thou hast no right to have them; they are strictly *his*. That, which he speaks to others, is not thine. E'en though he speak of *thee*, thou art not right to listen.—Does not thine own experience tell thee? Are not thy thoughts thine own? Words are but *thoughts* expressed; thou meanest them for those to whom they are spoken. Thou deemest it invasion of thy privilege, if others come to listen. So is it with thy neighbour. The devils have as little right to heaven, as *thou* to penetrate, unbidden, into thy brother's mind. Hence, in all ages, *listening* has been condemned. *What* wouldst thou listen

to? To hear others *praise* thee? Hearken not; 'tis very poison. Or dost thou listen to *thy censure*—to know what evil they will say of thee? If possible, 'tis worse; 'tis treachery indeed. Take care, then, how you listen.—To hear self spoken of *at all*, is odious. 'Tis instinct in the soul to hate it. 'Tis nature's tribute to its own deformity. Conscious of its fall, it shrinks unconsciously from contact with itself.—If you hear others in secret conversation—if possible, go from their presence; if not, then make a covenant with thine ear; lay curiosity aside, and be determined not to hearken. If you *can't* but hear, then *make it known* that so it is. If this would wound their feelings, then hear, and hearken not. Let not their converse lodge within thee. As words succeed each other, dismiss them from thy door; dwell not upon them for a moment; they soon shall be as though thou heardst them not. In this, as other things, *practice* does much; and with the *Spirit*, 'twill do more. In *Spartan* days a man was punished, not for the theft, but because he had not skill to *hide* it. How oft do we *think* evil of another! But if we hear another *thinking aloud* of *us*, our anger soon is stirred. We're ready to take vengeance on the *show* of evil; the hidden evil in ourselves we overlook. Oh, then, deal leniently with others; severely with thyself. Think of thy ways, thy failings, thine infirmities! Think of thy many thoughts; think of thy many words; and as thou wouldst that others deal with *thee*, so likewise deal with *them*!

"I said, I will be wise ; but it was far from me."

ECCL. VII. 23.

READER, how oft have *you*, how oft have *I*, experienced this ! A greater one than you, or *I*, expressed the same. The good he *would*, he did not ; the evil that he would not, that he *did*. (Rom. vii.) My soul, *how* is it ? Within thee dwells the Holy Spirit—the Lord of life and power. None can resist His will. And *yet*, the evil that is in thee gains the day ; strength becomes weakness ; wisdom is turned to folly,—light to dark. *Which* is the greater wonder—that, being foolish, thou art ever wise ; or, that, at times so wise, thou ever shouldst be foolish ? How often, on thy knees, thou hast seen the way so straight, the light so clear, God's grace so strong—that thou hast felt wisdom were thine for ever ; that folly would never dwell in thee again ? And *yet*, my soul, what tales of after folly hast thou had to tell ! In thy better moments, wisdom is nigh ; *so* nigh, it seems a part and parcel of thyself ; it seems the eye you see with, the ear you hear with, the air you breathe, the framework of your thoughts, the substance of your mind—your very being seems suffused with wisdom. At other times wisdom is *far* from thee—*so very far*—as far as innocence from sin, as man from God, as earth from heaven. In truth it *is* so. Wisdom was never *thine* ; it has no part in thee. Between thee, and thy better self, is fixed a gulf impassable ; of breadth unmeasured ; of depth untold. On either side the gulf art *thou*, and *wisdom*. On

this side wisdom; on the other side art thou. Oh, what a mystery!—thy days are spent on one side, or the other; either in wisdom or in folly. Now flesh is uppermost, and now the Spirit—no union can there be between the two. Each moment of thy life thou livest, or to *thyself*, or *God*.—My soul, bless God for thine experience; in mercy is it given. 'Tis not for nought that wisdom seems to elude thy grasp. 'Tis not for nought that thou hast felt thine own infirmity; that thou hast known the fitful nature of thy frames and feelings; the bitterness of broken purposes; the flimsy nature of thy best resolves; the lightning speed, with which sin comes between thee and thy vows; the wondrous ease, with which thou passest from wisdom to thy folly; from thoughts of goods to deeds of evil; from meekness, humility, and patience, to petulance and pride; from all the virtues of a saint to all the sinfulness of fallen nature. 'Tis not for nought that thou art mortified, to see thyself so fickle, and so vile. It is to bless, to teach, to humble thee, that when thou wouldst be wise, *wisdom* is *far* from *thee*.

“*That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?*”—ECCOL. vii. 24.

WISDOM is far from man—far off as sight is from the blind; as far as *God* is far. The blind see not the object, whether far or near. Thus, man discerns *himself* as little, as he knows *the Lord*. In ceasing to know God, man ceased to know *himself*. Then light and knowledge winged their flight away, and all was dark in-

deed. Sail round our planet, if thou wilt—all distant *earthly* things come near to thee, and thou to them ; but *Truth* is still as far from thee as ever—no earthly figure can express its range. Soar upwards, if thou canst ; for ever wing thy way onwards, and on, and on ; how hopeless e'er to reach the end ! 'Tis *infinite* ! Far off as *that* (if possible, still farther) is man from Truth, and Truth from man. Nought but a miracle brings man and Truth together. *God speaks*, and it is *done* ; the *Spirit* enters, and wisdom lives again ; man knows himself ; he knows his sins ; he knows their remedy ; in *Christ* he knows his *God*. Till *then* grace, truth, and peace were far ; the *Lord* was far ; all, *all* was far ! *Now* all is *nigh*.—God's judgments are a *deep*, a *mighty* deep. (Ps. xxxvi. 6.) All that God *does*, all that God is, is *deep*—His Word, His attributes, His grace, His providence, His essence, His eternal being—*all*, all is *deep*. Say, *who* can fathom it ? " 'Tis high as heaven, what *canst* thou do ? deeper than hell, what *canst* thou know ? " " Canst thou by searching find out God ? " (Job xi. 7, 8.) Measure the waters in thine hand ; mete out the heavens with the span ; take up the earth's materials at a grasp ; then weigh the hills in scales, the mountains in a balance—*then* mayest thou measure God ; *then* mayest thou fathom Truth. The plainest Scripture is too deep for thee. The shortest precept—the simplest promise—beggars thine understanding, and confounds thine heart. But *grace* supplies a line, wherewith to fathom what is fathomless. "*Faith* is the substance of things hoped for ; the evi-

dence of things not seen. (Heb. xi. 1.) The Christian fathoms all things ; what *can* be known, he knows ; what *can* be seen, he sees. The rest he leaves, in full assurance of its truth—more glorious in what he *knows not*, than in what he *knows*. In *this* he rests on sight ; in *that* on *Christ*, in whom he knows, and sees, and trusts, and lives—in whom he hopes to *reign*.

“ I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things.”—ECCLES. VII. 25.

WE live in stirring days, when *deeds* are everything—when closet work's neglected for active business, and little time is given to *meditation*. Yet, with more thought and prayer, activity were greater in the end, and all our actions more successful. Time is not lost that's spent in *meditation*—in searching wisdom's ways, and seeking out profound realities. There is that pauseth oft, and yet does *much*. There is that hasteneth, and does *little*. None works so heartily, nor reaps so fully, as he, whose wits are sharpened by prayer and *meditation*.—Reading, apart from this, does little good. 'Tis much the same as not digesting what you eat. 'Tis living on others' thoughts, and having none yourself. This only starves the soul. How many read the Bible thus ! If thought is exercised at all, 'tis but to find what *Commentators* say ; and thus they have all their knowledge second-hand.

How different when the *mind* is bent on what we read, and help is sought from *God*, to aid the meditation.—The art of *thinking* is difficult at first ; but “practice makes expert ;” it may be learnt by dint of effort. ’Tis well to set yourself a task. You say, “I’m quite unused to meditate. *How* shall I *begin* ?”—Deal gently with yourself at first. Select your subject—some passage from the Word. Then fix the time you choose to give ; say, *five minutes* at a time. Begin and think *aloud*. This makes it easier, and saves the mind from abstract thought—the hardest task of all. The sound e’en of your own voice will help you ; ’tis next to speaking to a friend. And what is meditation, but *communing with self*, that self may be a constant *hearer*?—But, more than all, make it a time of *prayer*—of communing with God. *This* helps the matter greatly. You take the words of Scripture. Ask *Jesus* what they mean. In doing this the mind is exercised. A glow of thought attends the effort. You honour *Jesus* ; and He will honour *thee*, by pouring out a largeness of capacity—a quicker mind. The interchange of thought ’twixt thee and *Jesus* goes on apace, and you’re surprised to find how long the exercise has lasted.—Thus *meditation* grows, the more it is encouraged. It feeds the soul, expands the mind, increases thought ; but, best of all, it brings thee into fellowship with *Jesus*. This is the very *life* of thought ; the edge of all intelligence ; the soul of *meditation*.

"One man among a thousand have I found."—
ECCL. VII. 28.

NOR a rough guess of numbers, but "counting one by one." (Verse 27.) Only "*one man among a thousand!*" The Preacher tells us elsewhere the *kind* of man he meant—one, who interpreted God's Word, and ways, intreating men to listen; one, who declared the righteousness of God, in contrast with the sinfulness of man; one, who bore messages of grace to sinners' souls—in short, he meant a *Christian*. Of such he found but *one* among a *thousand!* (Job xxx. 23.) Was grace less frequent *then* than *now*? In Christian England (England, *Christian called*) would Solomon still find so small a number? We might expect that greater honour would attend the mission of the Comforter—that when He had to take the things of Christ (John xvi. 14, 15)—Christ born, Christ crucified, Christ risen, and Christ glorified—His teaching would be seen and known the more. Yet *still* we mourn the smallness of the numbers. *Still* narrow is the way; *still* strait the gate; *still* few that find it—*still* broad the road to misery; how many walk in it! (Matt. vii. 14.) "*One man among a thousand!*" Ah! were it one in a *hundred*; one among *ten*; one out of *five*; or even one of *two*—'twere sad to think how many still were lost! Full well we know, but for the grace of God, *not one* among a thousand would be found. One of a *million* would there be? One of a *generation*? One of a *world*? No, *not one!* God gives the character of man; man as he is by *nature*; man

unregenerate, unvisited by grace; man without Christ; man without God. "There's *none righteous*, no *not one*." (Psa. 14; Eph. ii.) One of a thousand is a miracle of grace; e'en one from Adam to Adam's latest child, were still a miracle; a greater wonder than if ten thousand worlds were formed anew, and twice ten thousand suns sprung daily into being. Reader, art thou a *Christian*? If so, thy heart, and mine, present a miracle of miracles; a wonder greater far than aught that nature has to show. Art thou disposed to mourn the smallness of the number—that Christians are so few? 'Tis well to mourn—yet better to rejoice; better to know that all the *flock* are saved; that none are written in the Book of Life, but they shall surely come to glory. They ne'er shall perish, none pluck them from the hand of *Jesus*. He's pledged to guard—to love them to the end. Who chose, will call them; who calls, will keep them; who keeps, will glorify them—His word is sure. (Rom. viii. 30.)

"*A woman among all those have I not found.*"—

ECCL. VII. 28.

'Tis a hard saying—who can hear it? One *man* among a thousand the Preacher found; but among these, of *women*, found he *none*! Is woman's heart, then, different from *man's*—harder and blinder, further from grace and truth? First in transgression, was it *thus* she bore the penalty, till she undid the harm, by giving birth to *Jesus*? If, till *then* a blight was on her, *since* then 'tis otherwise. Last at the Cross, first at the grave of *Jesus*

—in faith, in charity—in patience, steadfastness and zeal—she shines pre-eminent. Look where you will, she is foremost in the cause; look where you will, among the saints, she far outnumbers *man*. Yet, Solomon's experience confirms our own—that *then*, or *now*, in woman or in man—from first to last—'tis *grace* that makes us differ. —Man's nature, since the Fall, has known no change. The heart, apart from sex or age, has been the same in blindness and corruption. Law-givers, patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, bear witness to the fact, which still we have before our eyes. Were godly women rare with Solomon? it was that God called fewer by his grace. Are they *now* more numerous? it is that more are *called*—God makes them willing in his day of power. (Psa. cx. 3.)—*One* thing we learn from Solomon—that the fair form of *woman* conceals a heart as hard, and sinful, as that which dwells in *man*,—that beauty, elegance, and softness, have no effect upon the soul, save to ensnare it—that all the blandishments of art, and gay attire, with all the fascinations of her nature, enhanced a thousandfold by education and a polished life, bestow no real excellence on woman. What are they but the "whited sepulchre"? Within its walls are "dead men's bones," and "all uncleanness" (Matt. xxiii. 27),—all the infirmities and sins of fallen nature—the same corruptions, passions, and affections, that reign in rougher *man*. By nature more impressible, more easily affected by outward things—so far she's more devotional than man; more frequent in the house of prayer, to forms and ordinances more

attentive. But *still*, within her there is found an ignorance of God, and opposition to the truth. She requires the same Almighty power to renew her soul, as needs the vilest of the other sex. How beautiful when woman's brought to *see* her own deformity, and say, "*All this is true!*"

"*God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*"—ECCL. VII. 29.

THE *origin* of evil who can tell? *How* found it place in God's creation? *Satan* infected man—and *there* we stop. 'Tis not for us to search what never can be known, or guess at that which God has not revealed.—All that God made was very good. (Gen. i. 31.) No taint of sin was *on* it, no seed of evil *in* it. God could not give birth to evil; His attributes of wisdom, holiness, and goodness, alike forbid the thought: the thing is impossible. Essential excellence harbours not imperfection; eternal being implies unchanging good. *Sin* was a pure *invention* of the wicked one, made from his own materials; he found them not in the fair works of God.—Man, self-apprenticed to the fiend, has learned the lesson well. Trained by the devil, now, for threescore hundred years, no wonder if he is clever at inventing evil. Each circling year beholds new forms of sin; fresh means of doing mischief; fresh vanities discovered; fresh ways of setting at defiance good sense, good order, and good feeling; new blinds to youth, and inexperience. Man's ingenuity is racked for fresh *amusements*—in other words, for fresh

temptations—while grosser evil drives a busy trade in tricking out fresh stimulants to vice.—But, oh ! my soul, why go so far from home ? *Within thyself* the sin abounds. *Thou* hast also learnt thy lesson in the school ; fertile in evil as thy fellow man, thou art not behind him in *invention*—in giving birth to evil. *Whence* all thy readiness for sin ? Thine ingenuity to frame excuses ? Thy quickness in devising reasons why *self* be gratified, and duties put aside ? How apt to veil thy faults ! How quick to seize the opportunity of pleasing man ! In how many ways thou triest to cheat the Lord, and rob Him of his service ! How often hast thou countenanced the world, and set thy seal on its inventions, by following its pleasures and its sins ! What is thy life, and what thy nature, but one invention of all that's evil ! Mankind at large are but a magazine of "arts." What endless shades of character ! What difference in sin ! (Isaiah liii. 6.) No two alike in the complexion of their failings ; each mind, each character, framing its special faults, inventing ways peculiar to itself ; but all alike showing an ingenuity for sin. How true the Preacher's word, that "God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions."

"*A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine.*"—

ECCL. VIII. 1.

WHAT makes the difference between the well-bred, and the boor ? 'Tis *education*—the being

versed in *wisdom*. You see it in the gait, the speech, the manners ; the eye expresses it, the very features tell it ; you read it in the whole demeanour. Thus a man's wisdom *makes his face to shine*.—If thus it be with earthly wisdom, much more is it the case with *heavenly* understanding. In giving vigour to the soul, and planting there a godly principle, it sows the seeds of higher bearing. It gives learning superior to the “schools ;” it treats of things unseen by mortal eye, of agencies unfelt by mortal man ; it brings before the mind a science more profound than all the depths of man's philosophy. *These* treat of matter only, or of mind ; *this* treats of God himself, His nature, attributes, and will. It penetrates the veil, that severs God from man ; it shares the angels' thoughts. By faith it sees what they behold more nearly, and, in its heaven-born powers, has deeper notions of the truth than they.—If learning “makes” a man the “gentleman,” say, *who* should be refined as he, that learns from God Himself, and gets his wisdom in the school of Christ ! If good society improves the manners, *who* should be courteous as the man, who is daily in the company of Jesus ; imbibing from His presence the bearing of the saints ; breathing the atmosphere of heaven ! Have you not seen it in the Church of Christ ; the altered mien ; the softened look ; the chastened speech, of one *who* lately was far otherwise ? The eye bespeaks a change, and, in its new expression, tells you that Jesus dwells within. Can it be otherwise ? Can God be there, and no one know it ! The Com-

forter be there, nor cause the face to shine ! Who has not witnessed it in men of low degree ! Their manners straight assume a dignity above their station. They have seen the King of kings, and learnt true feeling, manners, and politeness. The worldling wonders *where* they have learnt it. He may deny the principle, but can't deny the *fact*. His conscience tells him 'tis something godlike—*hence* he dislikes it. He sees no charm in godliness. The shining face thus shines in vain for *him*. It speaks to him of what he neither knows nor loves—the life of God, and principle of heaven.

“ And the boldness of his face shall be changed.”

—ECCL. VIII. 1.

READER, what is the meaning of the text ? Perhaps it seems to thee obscure. Then bear with me a moment, while I tell thee my thoughts concerning it. If haply I have found the mind of Solomon—the mind of *God* in Solomon—'tis well. And may it thus be blessed to thee and me ! *Boldness* is holy or unholy—either effrontery, or honest confidence. Wisdom removes the one, and gives the other.—The *Pharisee* is bold from ignorance. He is blind alike to God's requirements, and his own defects—*hence* he is not afraid, and thinks himself prepared for death and judgment. *Such* boldness is not safe. I hope it is not *thine*.—How different the boldness of the *Christian* ! He is bold (and justly so) because his sins are cancelled, and his pardon sealed ; because, in Christ, he

stands complete, trusting in promises unchangeable, and built on faultless grace. Through sense of perfect love he is bold e'en for the judgment day. (1 John iv. 17.) He owns himself the least of saints—the chief of sinners—and *yet*, in Christ, he is not afraid. Thus he, who once was bold in ignorance, has now his *boldness changed*.—The Pharisee fears not the evils of his heart; sees not the danger of temptation; but plunges boldly into sin. How different the child of God! (Prov. xiv. 16.) He *once* was so; but *now* he dares not tamper with his sins. Knowing how weak he is, he ventures not a step, but in the strength of *Jesus*. He fears to meet his trials, to combat his infirmities, or face the enemy, unarmed with grace—and, in his helplessness, he throws himself on Him, who is pledged to succour him in all his need. "*The boldness of his face*" is "*changed*" in every way—*here*, changed to fear—*there*, changed to boldness once again. What once he feared not, *now* he has learned to fear—the world, the flesh, the devil. And, having learned this fear, he has also learned how to be bold in *Christ*. Armed from God's armoury, and clad with power, in faith and prayer he runs his daily race. Where duty leads, he feels 'twere wrong to fear. Where grace demands a sacrifice, he is bold. Ever and anon he chides his fearful heart, and listens for the voice, "BE NOT AFRAID, 'TIS I." (John vi. 20.) None can prevail, but he that's bold in *Christ*, and none shall fall, but he that's bold in *self*. Reader, may you and I be bold aright!







